

AINSLEES

THE MAGAZINE THAT ENTERTAINS

JANUARY~1922

20 CENTS


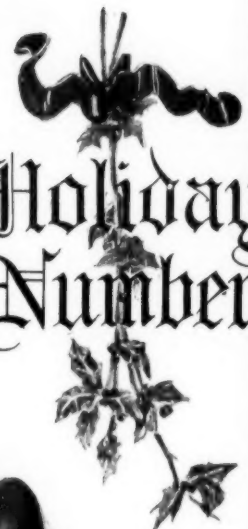
Ethel Watts Mumford

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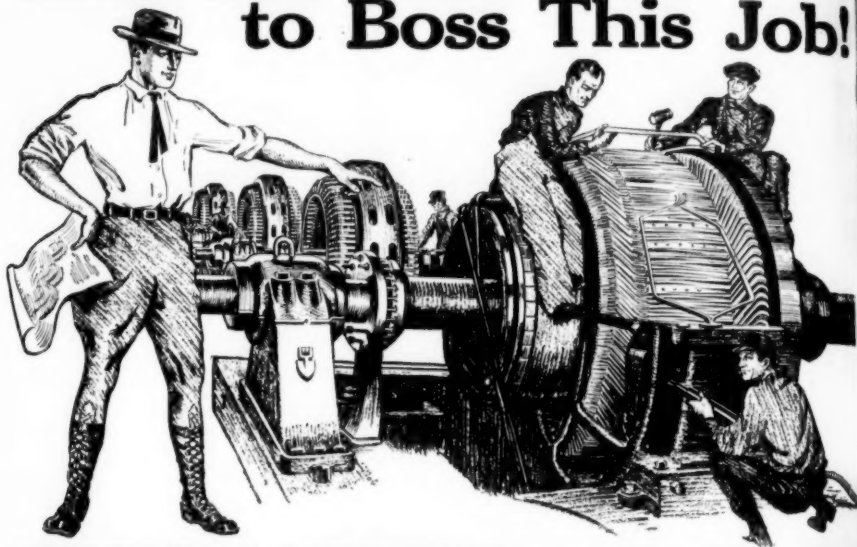
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COVER DESIGN BY
FREDERICK DUNCAN

You, Too, Can Learn to Boss This Job!



"ELECTRICAL EXPERTS" Earn \$12 to \$30 a Day

What's **YOUR** Future?

Trained "Electrical Experts" are in great demand at the highest salaries, and the opportunities for advancement and a big success in this line are the greatest ever known. "Electrical Experts" earn \$70 to \$200 a week. Fit yourself for one of these big paying positions.

Be an "Electrical Expert"

Today even the ordinary electrician—the "screw driver" kind is making money—big money. But it's the trained man—the man who knows the why's and wherefores of Electricity—the "Electrical Expert"—who is picked out to "boss" ordinary electricians—to boss big jobs—the jobs that pay.

\$3,500 to \$10,000 a Year

Get in line for one of these "Big Jobs," by enrolling now for my easily-learned, quickly-grasped, right-up-to-the-minute, Spare-Time Home Study Course in Practical Electricity.

Age or Lack of Experience No Draw-Back

You don't have to be a College Man; you don't have to be a High School graduate. My Course in Electricity is the most simple, thorough, and successful in existence, and offers every man, regardless of age, education, or previous experience, the chance to become, in a very short time, an "Electrical Expert," able to make from \$70 to \$200 a week.

I Give You a Real Training

As Chief Engineer of the Chicago Engineering Works I know exactly the kind of training a man needs to get the best positions at the highest salaries. Hundreds of my students are now earning \$3,500 to \$10,000. Many are now successful ELECTRICAL CONTRACTORS.

Satisfaction Guaranteed

So sure am I that you can learn Electricity—so sure am I that after studying with me, you, too, can get into the "big money" class in electrical work, that I will guarantee under bond to return every single penny paid me in tuition, if, when you have finished my course, you are not satisfied it was the best investment you ever made.

FREE—Electrical Working Outfit—FREE

I give each student a Splendid Outfit of Electrical Tools, Materials and Measuring Instruments absolutely FREE. I also supply them with Drawing Outfits, examination paper, and many other things that other schools don't furnish. You do PRACTICAL work—AT HOME. You start right in after the first few lessons in WORK AT YOUR PROFESSION in a practical way.

SAVE \$45.50 BY ENROLLING NOW

You can save \$45.50 in tuition by enrolling now. Let me send you full particulars of my great Special Offer, and my Free booklet on "How to Become an Electrical Expert."

L. L. COOKE, CHIEF ENGINEER CHICAGO ENGINEERING WORKS

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Chicago, Ill.

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**ONLY \$4 A MONTH
AFTER FREE TRIAL**

Not a cent in advance. No deposit of any kind. No obligation to buy. The coupon is all you need send. The Oliver comes to you at our risk for five days free trial in your own home. Decide for yourself whether you want to buy or not. If you don't want to keep the Oliver, simply send it back at our expense. If you do agree that it is the finest typewriter, regardless of price, and want to keep it, take over a year to pay at the easy rate of only \$4 a month. You can make the first payment \$3 if you wish.

Buy Direct

During the war we learned many lessons. We found that it was unnecessary to have a vast number of traveling salesmen and many expensive branch houses. We were able to discontinue many other superfluous sales methods. As a result, \$49.50 cash or \$55 in monthly installments now buy the identical Oliver formerly \$100.

Our Latest and Best Model

This is the finest and costliest Oliver we have ever built. It has all the latest improvements. It has a standard keyboard so that anyone may turn to it with ease. Try this Oliver five days free and prove its merit to yourself.

Among the 900,000 Oliver purchasers are such distinguished concerns as:

Columbia Graphophone Co., National City Bank of N. Y., Boston Elevated Railway, Hart, Schaffner & Marx, U. S. Steel Corporation, New York Edison Co., American Bridge Co., Diamond Match Co., and others of great rank.

Send No Money

No money is required with the coupon. This is a real free trial offer. All at our expense and risk. If you don't want to keep the typewriter just send it back, express collect. We will refund the outgoing transportation charges, so you won't lose a penny.

Mail the Coupon

Note the two-way coupon. It brings you an Oliver for five trial or our catalog and copy of our booklet "The High Cost of Typewriters—The Reason and the Remedy."

the OLIVER Typewriter Company
731 Oliver Typewriter Bldg., Chicago, Ill.

THE OLIVER TYPEWRITER COMPANY. 731 Oliver Typewriter Bldg., Chicago, Ill.

☐ Ship me a new Oliver No. 9 Typewriter for five days' free inspection. If I keep it I will pay \$55 as follows: \$3 at the end of trial period and then at the rate of \$4 per month. The title to remain in you until fully paid for. If I make cash settlement at end of trial period I am to deduct ten per cent and remit to you \$49.50.

If I decide not to keep it, I will ship it back at your expense at the end of five days.

My shipping point is.....

☐ Do not send a machine until I order it. Mail me your book—"The High Cost of Typewriters—The Reason and the Remedy," your de luxe catalog and further information.

Name.....

Street Address.....

City..... State.....

Occupation or Business.....

Please mention this magazine when answering advertisements

January
1922

AINSLEE'S

THE MAGAZINE THAT ENTERTAINS

Vol. XLVIII
No. 5

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Monthly publication issued by Ainslee's Magazine Co., Seventh Avenue and Fifteenth Street, New York. Ormond G. Smith, President; George C. Smith, Secretary and Treasurer, 78-89 Seventh Avenue, New York City. Copyright, 1921, by Ainslee's Magazine Co., New York. Copyright, 1921, by Ainslee's Magazine Co., Great Britain. All Rights Reserved. Publishers everywhere are cautioned against using any of the contents of this Magazine either wholly or in part. Entered as second-class matter, September 11, 1907, at the Post Office at New York, N. Y., under act of Congress of March 3, 1879. Canadian subscription, \$2.50. Foreign \$2.12.

WARNING—Do not subscribe through agents unknown to you. Complaints are daily made by persons who have been thus victimized.

IMPORTANT—Authors, agents, and publishers are requested to note that this firm does not hold itself responsible for loss of unsolicited manuscripts while at this office or in transit; and that it cannot undertake to hold uncalled-for manuscripts for a longer period than six months. If the return of manuscript is expected, postage should be inclosed.

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5,000,000 Men Are After the Routine Jobs—

Break Away From
This Competition—

Command Big Pay!

When business slackens, can your employer "let you go"—and tomorrow hire almost any routine man from this army of 5,000,000 men and find him competent to take your place?

Observe that when a business trims its crew, it is almost never the big-pay men who walk the plank.

Not only are the specialists retained—the Accountants, Production Managers, Traffic Managers, and, in fact, the managers of any of the important departments of a business—but they are frequently promoted. Other concerns are in need of their ability, and come bidding for their services.

Many of these men who today are going rapidly ahead were no better off than you, several years ago. Today, while others walk the streets, these men walk into the better jobs.

There is no mystery about their swift advancement. There is a way that's interesting and practical whereby any man of average intelligence can get the training that will put him in the big-pay class. Literally thousands of ambitious men have found this way in the LaSalle Problem Method. They have chosen the line of work that most appealed to them—then, right in the quiet of their own homes, without losing an hour from work or a dollar of pay, they have solved the problems they today are meeting in the better jobs.

Situations which they face today are identical with those they faced in spare-time study. They have been shown exactly how to meet them—guided every step of the way by some of the ablest business men, in their respective fields, in America.



Read these statements, typical of over 1,000 which we will send you in booklet form and which represent but a small part of the many thousands of similar letters in our files:

"The most efficient and most rapidly promoted men in our whole organization are LaSalle-trained."

"Promoted to General Manager."

"Now a director in two banks."

"From bookkeeper advanced to chief accountant—salary increased 500%."

"Passed bar examination with highest grade, in competition with many resident school graduates."

"The Problem Method increased my income \$2,500 a year."

"Passed C. P. A. examination. You will be interested to know that 50% of the successful candidates were LaSalle-trained men."

An analysis of the letters from 1,089 LaSalle members reporting definite salary increases during 3 months' time shows an average increase per man of 56%.

While the axe hangs over every business office, it's the time of all times to free yourself forever from the treadmill jobs.

Mark on the coupon the training that attracts you, sign and mail it to the University. It will bring you full information, together with particulars of our convenient-payment plan; also your free copy of the inspiring book—"Ten Years' Promotion in One."

Break away from the crowd of routine pluggers. Find out today what YOU must do to put yourself among the men who command big money. Mail the coupon NOW.

INQUIRY COUPON

LASALLE EXTENSION UNIVERSITY, Dept. 165-R CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

Please send me catalog and full information regarding the course and service I have marked with an X below. Also a copy of your booklet, "Ten Years' Promotion in One," all without obligation to me.

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| <input type="checkbox"/> Business Management | <input type="checkbox"/> Law—Degree of LL. B. | <input type="checkbox"/> Banking and Finance | <input type="checkbox"/> Expert Bookkeeping |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Higher Accountancy | <input type="checkbox"/> Commercial Law | <input type="checkbox"/> Personnel and Employment Management | <input type="checkbox"/> Business English |
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Name..... Present Position.....

Address.....

Please mention this magazine when answering advertisements

Classified Advertising

Agents and Help Wanted

BE A DETECTIVE. Excellent opportunity, good pay, travel. Write C. T. Ludwig, 346 Westover Building, Kansas City, Mo.

MEN—Age 17 to 55. Experience unnecessary. Travel; make secret investigations, reports. Salaries: \$100 to \$150. American Detective Agency, 111, St. Louis.

RAILWAY TRAFFIC INSPECTORS earn from \$110 to \$200 per month and expenses. Travel if desired. Limited advancement. No age limit. We train you. Positions furnished under guarantee. Write for Booklet CM 25, Standard Business Training Institute, Buffalo, N. Y.

\$10.00 WORTH of finest toilet soaps, perfumes, toilet waters, spices, etc., absolutely free to agents on our refund plan. Laccasian Co., Dept. 427, St. Louis, Mo.

AGENTS—\$60 to \$200 a Week. Free Samples. Gold Sign Letters for store and office windows. Any one can do it. Big demand. Liberal offer to general agents. Metallic Letter Co., 3317 N. Clark Street, Chicago.

SHIRT MANUFACTURER wants agents to sell work and dress shirts direct to wearer. Big salaries. Write for literature. Free samples. Madison Mills, 503 Broadway, New York.

YOUR name on 35 linen cards and case 20 cents. Agents outfit free. Big profits. John W. Burt, Conduction, Ohio.

DETECTIVES EARN BIG MONEY. Travel. Excellent opportunity. Experience unnecessary. Particulars free. Write, American Detective System, 1968 Broadway, N. Y.

WE WANT MEN AND WOMEN who are desirous of making \$25.00 to \$200.00 per week clear profit from the start in a permanent business of their own. Mitchell's Magic Marvel Washing Compound washes clothes spotlessly clean in ten to fifteen minutes. One hundred other uses in every home. Nothing else like it. Nature's mightiest cleanser. Contains no lye, lime, acid or wax. Fastest selling article ever sold through agents. Free samples make sales easy. Enormous repeat orders. 300 per cent profit. Exclusive territory. We guarantee sale of every package. No capital or experience required. Baker, Ohio, made \$6000 last month. Write for full details. 1. Mitchell & Co., Desk 333, 1208-1214 E. 61st., Chicago, Ill.

MEN WANTED to make Secret Investigations and reports. Experience unnecessary. Write J. Ganoor, Former Gov't Detective, 120, St. Louis.

AGENTS—Steady income, large manufacturer of Soaps, Perfumes, Toilet Articles and Pure Food Products, etc., wishes representatives in each locality. Manufacturer direct to consumer. Big profits. Honest goods. Whole or spare time. Cash or credit. Send at once for particulars. American Products Co., 5728 American Bldg., Cincinnati, Ohio.

FIREMEN—Travellers—Baggage-men, \$140-\$200. Colored Porters by Railroads everywhere. Experience unnecessary. 915 Rye Bureau, E. St. Louis, Ill.

WANTED—Men over 18, Railway Mail Clerks. \$135 monthly. List positions free. Write Franklin Institute, Dept. T 2, Rochester, N. Y.

WE START YOU IN BUSINESS, furnishing everything; men and women \$50 to \$100 weekly operating our "Specialty Candy Factory" anywhere. Booklet free. W. Hillier Rascadale, Drawer 29, East Orange, N. J.

BIG MONEY FOR AGENTS. Crew Manufacturers. Salesmen. Write at once for particulars regarding the quick selling "Common Sense" Electric Iron. Big Money can be made. Every home needs an iron. We have several plans which sell these irons. Write for details today. Address: Corporation Appliance Company, Household Department 10, 538 South Dearborn Street, Chicago.

Automobiles

AUTOMOBILE Owners, Garagemen, Mechanics, Rebuilders—Send for free copy of our current issue. It contains helpful, instructive information on overhauling, ignition troubles, repairing carburetors, starter batteries, etc. Over 120 pages, illustrated. Send for free copy today. Automobile Digest, 530 Butler Bldg., Cincinnati.

Farm Lands

CLAY LOAM LANDS—40, 80 acre tracts in clover district of Michigan; rich soil; \$15 to \$35 acre. Easy terms. Send for Free booklet, Swigart Land Co., X-1265, First National Bank Bldg., Chicago.

Help Wanted—Female

\$6—\$18 a dozen decorating pillow tops at home—experienced unnecessary; particulars for stamp. Tapestry Paint Co., 110 Lexington, Ind.

WANTED—Girls—Women. Become Dress Designers. \$135 monthly. Sample lessons free. Write immediately. Franklin Institute, Dept. T 561, Rochester, N. Y.

Patents and Lawyers

INVENTORS desiring to secure patents should write for our guide-book "How To Get Your Patent." Send sketch or description for our opinion of its patentable nature. Randolph & Co., Dept. 412, Washington, D. C.

PATENTS. Write for Evidence of Conception Blank and free guide books. Send model or sketch and description for free opinion of its patentable nature. Highest references. Prompt Attention. Reasonable Terms. Victor J. Evans & Co., 767 Ninth, Washington, D. C.

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INVENTIONS WANTED. Cash or Royalty for ideas. Adam Fisher Mfg. Co., 223, St. Louis, Mo.

INVENTORS: If you have an invention and don't want to spend unnecessary money in securing a patent, write to Inventors & Engineers Consulting Co., P. O. Box 341, Washington, D. C.

PATENTS SECURED. Submit sketch or model of your invention for examination. Write for Record of Invention blank and valuable book, free. J. L. Jackson & Co., 205 Oakway Building, Washington, D. C.

Personal

DO YOU want success? To win friends and be happy? Wonderful results. "Success" key and Personality sketch for 10c and birthdate. Thomson-Heywood, 300 Chronicle Bldg., San Francisco.

ASTROLOGY—Stars tell Life's Story. Send birth date and time for trial reading. Edly, Westport Rd., 33-71 Kansas City, Missouri.

WRITE THE WORDS FOR A SONG. We compose music and guarantee to secure publication on royalty basis by New York publisher. Our Chief Composer and Lyric Editor is a song-writer of national reputation and has written many big song-hits. Submit poems on any subject. Broadway Station, 275 Fitzgerald Bldg., New York.

ASTROLOGY. Send time and birth information for reliable scientific and to Plato oldest astrologer, Box 102, Buffalo, N. Y. One year's future one dollar.

ZEE Beautiful girl pictures. 10 wonderful poses \$1.00; 18 specials \$2.00. Bairart Co., 125, St. Louis, Mo.

ARE YOU INTERESTED in your future? Trial reading for birthdate and 10c. Crane, 480 Advertising Bldg., Chicago.

Salesmen Wanted

SALESMEN—Ambition and training. That's what it takes to get the Big Jobs today. We train you and secure the position: write today. American School of Salesmanship, Eighth Floor, 29 E. Jackson St., Chicago.

TRAVELING Field Representatives wanted. Should net \$10,000 yearly. Choice of territory. Weekly advances. Merchants School of Advertising, Dept. 14, 22 Quincy St., Chicago.

Shorthand

SHORTHAND—Best practical shorthand in 4 hours; saved with easy graph. Proof lessons. Brochure free. Write for literature, EB-26, Station F, New York.

Short Stories and Photographs

WRITE NEWS ITEMS and short stories for pay in spare time. Book and plans free. Press Reporting Institute, 1400, St. Louis, Mo.

WHITE PHOTOPLAYS—\$25—\$500 any one for suitable ideas. Experience unnecessary; complete outline form. Press League, 439 St. Louis.

FREE to writers—A wonderful little book of money-making hints. Applications to the A B C of successful story and short story. Absolutely Free. Just send. Authors' Press, Dept. No. Adams, N. Y.

WRITERS' Stories, Poems, Plays, are wanted for publication. Literary Bureau, 175, Hamilton, Mo.

AMBITIOUS WRITERS send today Free Copy America's leading magazine for writers of photoplays, stories, plays, songs. Instructional, helpful. Write Digest, 605 Butler Bldg., Cincinnati.

PHOTOPLAYS WANTED for Culture Producers; also stories. Submit manuscript if a beginner; write for Free Plan and Details. Harvard Company, 56, Francisco.

Songs, Poems, etc.

YOU Write the Words for a Song, we compose the music free and publish it. Send Song-Poem to-day. B. Lemer Co., 5 W. 125th St., New York.

WRITE A SONG POEM. Love, Mirth, Home, Comic or any subject. I compose music and guarantee publication. Send words to-day. Edward Trem, 65 Bank Block, Chicago.

HAVE YOU SONG POEMS? I have the best proposition. Ray Hibbler, 1012, Dickens Ave., Chicago.

SONGWRITERS! Learn of the demand for songs suitable for dancing. The opportunities greatly changed since we offer new writers, obtainable only by "Songwriters' Manual & Guide" sent free. Submit your ideas for songs at once for criticism and advice. We revise poems, compose music, secure copyright and publish free publication or outright sale of song. Knickerbocker Studios, 301 Gayety New York.

WRITE THE WORDS FOR A SONG. We write the music, copyright and publish professional copies which are sold to over 200 performers and theatres. Submitted to 20 publishers for sale. Our Chief of Staff wrote the best Ballad Success of All Time. Millions of copies of his songs have been sold. Bell Studios, 1199 Broadway, New York.

WRITE THE WORDS FOR A SONG. We revise poems, compose music and guarantee to secure publication on royalty basis by a New York music publisher. Our Chief Composer and Lyric Editor is a writer of national reputation and has written many big song-hits. Millions of copies of his songs have been sold. Broadway Composing Studios, 190 Fitzgerald Building, New York City.

SONG POEMS—You write words, we write music; print 100 authentic song-poems in your name. Write for particulars, Suite 5, 480 Broad St., Newark, N. J.

Stammering

ST-STU-T-TTERING and Stammering Cured At Home. Instructive Booklet. Walter McDonnell, 80 Potomac Bank Building, Washington, D. C.

How I Found a \$10,000 Job in a Waste Basket

Truth is often stranger than fiction as evidenced by the fact that I found an opportunity in a waste basket that quickly placed me in the \$10,000 a year class.

By Philip Wilson

If anyone had told me a couple of years ago that I would be in the position I am in today I would have made me sore, because at that time my prospects did not amount to a row of beans. After ten years drudgery as a bookkeeper I was only earning \$5.00 a week. Further promotion was almost impossible and even if it came my way, it could only mean five or ten dollars more a week at the most.

From morning until night I worked on endless rows of figures, punched the clock on my arrival and again on quitting. Frankly, I was sour on life. And then, as though by a touch of magic, my entire prospects changed—thanks to a dilapidated old waste basket.

And now for the other side of the picture. At the present time I am earning about \$10,000 a year, have a comfortable home, earn enough to enjoy the luxuries that make life worth while, have a bank account that is growing each month, to say nothing of the fact that I am engaged in work that seems like play, that fascinates, thrills and enables me to live like a gentleman. The funny part of it is that if anyone had told me two years ago that I could make good in my present profession, I would have scorned the idea as impossible.

I found my opportunity in a waste basket. In my case I was eating lunch in our stock room because I could not afford to go to a restaurant. In the corner of the room I noticed a waste basket. Sticking out of it was a dirty looking old magazine. Not finding anything of interest among the articles, I idly turned over the advertising pages when something stopped me. For fifteen minutes or so I studied the page before me carefully. Then I took it over to the stock room clerk.

"What do you think of this, Jim," I asked.

Poor Jim, who is still in that stock room, only read the headline and snuffed in contempt.

Anyway the advertisement set me thinking although my negative condition at that time made me feel somewhat the way Jim did. But anyway, I ripped that advertisement out of the magazine and stuffed it in my pocket.

Several times that afternoon I pulled it out and studied it carefully. Every time I read it my pulse quickened, because if true at all, it pointed a way for me to increase my earning power many times over, to say nothing of getting away from the drudgery of bookkeeping.

"Why couldn't I do the same?" I asked myself.

The Old Man Negative whispered in my ear that I was foolish to even think about it—that I was not cut out for it. So I put the advertisement in my desk and for the time being I forgot it. Several weeks later I ran across it again and this time I acted. I mailed the coupon in for particulars.



Philip Wilson, who tells his story how chance brought him, from a dilapidated old waste basket, the secret that suddenly lifted him out of the rut to wonderful success and big earnings.

of top notch sales managers and salesmen, formed just for the purpose of showing men how to become master salesmen.

Through the help of the N. S. T. A., hundreds of men have been able to realize their dreams of success, health, and independence. Men without previous experience or special qualifications have learned the secrets of selling that make star salesmen—for salesmen are not "born," but made, and any man can easily master the principles of salesmanship through the wonderful system of the National Salesmen's Training Association. On record in the Association files are hundreds of letters similar to the few shown on this page. The most amazing part of it all is that these successful men had no previous selling experience before the N. S. T. A. trained them and helped them secure sales positions.

In my own case for instance, it may sound like a fairy tale but at the end of my first month I received a letter from my sales manager congratulating me on my success. I had made a record for my territory.

Previous Experience Unnecessary

Salesmanship is not a natural gift—it is an Art and Science that is open to any man of average intelligence. There are many fundamental rules and principles that anyone can learn and put into practice. There are certain ways of doing and saying things in selling and once you are master of these selling secrets, the world is before you. The man who understands the underlying principles of salesmanship has a two fold grip on prosperity.

A Great Book on Selling Sent Free

The interesting book "The Knight of the Grip" will be sent absolutely free to those sending in the attached coupon. This valuable book tells you all about the N. S. T. A. method of Salesmanship Training and Free Employment Service. In addition, you will read of the big opportunities open for you in the selling field and personal stories of men from all sections of the country and from all trades and professions who have suddenly stepped from small pay jobs to magnificent earnings as a result of the N. S. T. A. system.

Simply fill out and mail the attached coupon and "The Knight of the Grip" will be promptly mailed to you. National Salesmen's Training Association, Dept. 4-A, Chicago, Illinois.

National Salesmen's Training Association,
Dept. 4-A, Chicago, Ill., U. S. A.

Please send me, without any obligation on my part, your free book, "A Knight of the Grip," and full information about the N. S. T. A. system of Salesmanship training and Employment Service. Also a list showing lines of business with openings for salesmen.

Name
Street
City..... State.....

Please mention this magazine when answering advertisements

What Others Have Done

\$234 in Two Weeks

I had never earned more than \$100 a month. Last week I cleared \$234 and this week \$275. You can do wonders for me—Geo. W. Lewis, 107 W. 42nd Place, Oklahoma, Okla.

As High as \$100 a Day

I took your course two years ago. Was earning \$15 a week then. As time went on I was the largest firm in the city. I have earned more than \$100 a day. You secured me my position. Our Sales Manager in a bank. Bob S. Crawford Ave., Chicago, Ill.

\$1,562 in Thirty Days

My earnings for the past thirty days are \$1,562.10 and I was second place in March although only one week during that month.—C. W. Campbell, Louisville, Va.



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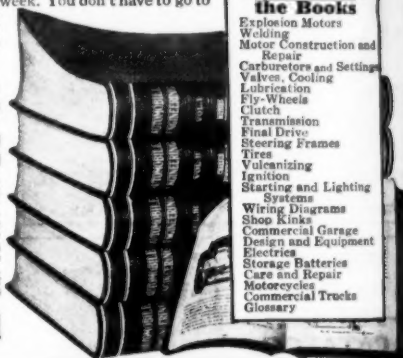
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AINSLEE'S

VOL. XLVIII.

JANUARY, 1922.

No. 5

In Cold Blood

By Ethel Watts Mumford

Author of "Aurore,"

"An Angle of the Triangle," etc.



CHAPTER I.

LINDA CATHERTON announced her presence by a whistle, clear and sweet as a mocking-bird's call, and entered Teddy Beaudine's bedroom without the formality of knocking. Teddy, a green-eyed blonde, dainty and pink and white as her great-grandmother's portrait by Mignard in the drawing-room downstairs, looked up, smiling, and continued her fascinating occupation of tearing up love letters and throwing them in the open grate. Linda closed the door, leaned against it, and laughed.

"You-all had better be thorough," she admonished in her soft Southern drawl. "If the groom should ever happen on the cemetery of your dead loves, Teddy, he'd just plain die; don't you know he would?"

Teddy responded with a nod as her long, black-lashed eyes flickered over the contents of a blue-satin candy box. "Um, um," she agreed, and continued to destroy the evidence of her popular past. Her guest turned to contemplate her own reflection in the long, gilt-framed mirror. The picture was beautiful enough to reward her, and she studied herself with critical care. She

was tall, or she could not have seen herself so well in the high-hung looking-glass. Her hair was a heavy cap of waving blue black, her skin warm white and of the satin smoothness of cream. Her exquisite mouth was by no means innocent of the rouge pot, but that feature was the only one aided by artifice. Her nose was straight and clean-cut, and Juno might have envied her brilliant black eyes.

"But I hate to burn Bobby's letters, and there's Brad's poems— How-ever," Teddy sighed, "I suppose Con never would understand. Men are so queer!"

Linda collapsed in a graceful heap on the floor by her friend, scooped up a handful of letters at random, and tossed them on the flame. "There," she said; "you've got to get it over with—and I want to talk to you seriously."

"Anybody'd think they were your love letters, the way you act," replied Teddy, without the slightest show of anger at her chum's vandalism.

"They might have been," the other observed carelessly. "I bet I've got the duplicates of a lot of them. But what I want to say is *this*—you know how poor I am?"

"I most certainly do," agreed her friend unemotionally.

"Well, I'm tired of it!" Linda's black eyes blazed with long-pent fires. "Sick and tired of it, and I'm going to quit it, and, oh, Teddy—*will* you help me?"

"Meaning?" inquired Teddy, flicking another note on to the embers.

"Of course, you've got to have his two sisters and your two sisters and Sally Dean, because she introduced you and made the match, or I'd have been a bridesmaid, of course, and you'd have treated me to my bridesmaid dress.

"Well, I—I've got nothing fit to wear—and if you *could* lend me one of your trousseau dresses— Nobody here will see it afterward. You'll be up North, and your husband won't know, things will look so different on me and on you. Teddy, I'm desperate! I'm going to make a hit or die—I've got to!"

"Dear, dear," murmured Teddy, "how hectic! May I inquire who or what you intend to hit?"

"Roland Bland, your best man," Linda answered with decision.

The bride-elect looked up, evidently startled out of her calm, her eyes widened, the pink of her cheeks flooded up to the golden roots of her crinkly hair. "Oh, Lindy, *no!*" she exclaimed. "Why, my dear, you know what an *awful* reputation he's got. Why, why—it was all I could do to make father and mother let me have him at the house. I couldn't have done a *thing*; it was Con who won them over—said he and Rowly had been pals since they were in school, and he couldn't have any one else. But *you* know and *I* know, Lindy—it's *true*. Why, Con even admits to me it's true. Roland's awfully rich, of course, but, good gracious!—no self-respecting girl could stay married to *him!* It isn't only that he's fast—" The long speech left Teddy breathless. In her agitation she had risen to her feet. Linda supported her weight on

her perfect arms, and thrust her feet straight out before her on the floor, as she looked up at her friend. Her face was hard as marble, and her eyes glittered like jet.

"But that's just it, silly. I don't *intend* to stay married to him—I won't have to. I'm marrying for alimony, and if there's anything in past performances, Roland Bland is a sure loser. I guess I can gamble a couple of years against a life income and 'a chance to see the world,' as they say in the navy. Oh, don't tell me it's cold-blooded; I know it. But it's because I'm hot-blooded that I'm going to put it over if I can, and *you're* going to help me."

Teddy sat down hard on the edge of the chintz-hung tester bed. "Of all!" she exclaimed. "Of all! Why—why—it wouldn't be fair!"

"To whom? To him?" Linda came back quickly. "I'd like to know why. Wouldn't it be poetic justice for a woman to make a monkey out of him? Get the best of him? 'Get his goat,' we'll say? Why, he's called the 'Universal Correspondent!' Don't they say Mrs. Allerton killed herself over him? Besides, I tell you, I *won't* stay in this stick-in-the-mud Southern town, with two younger sisters coming on, and not enough to dress even me. I'm not going to marry one of our home boys. I'm not going to be 'the beautiful Miss Catherton' for a season or two and be shelved like Lily Farka. I've got brains and I've got looks, and I'm going where they'll count."

"But, Lindy, listen. When I'm married you shall come and visit me. I'll give you heaps of chances. You don't have to pick on Rowly. Why, you're a beauty, and you're only twenty-one."

"Only twenty-one," Linda sneered. "You know in the South you're a Methuselah at twenty-five, and, my darling Ted, saving your presence, I don't want to rely on your fond memory of me to prompt you to reach out a helping hand.

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You'll be just as forgetful as anybody else, once you get into the swing of things. No, *sir*—I want New York, London, Paris. I want *big* money. I want the keenest competitors and the fastest pace. And where will I ever get a chance at that if I don't catch Roland Bland? You know it's my best bet!"

Teddy smothered her shocked sensibilities. As always, her magnetic friend overpowered her.

"Well, you know"—she hesitated—"Con says that if Roland is handled right—he's awfully generous. Between you and me, Linda, my Con's no saint, either. Roland was engaged once; did you know that? Con says the trouble was just that they were too pally. She was older a bit, and they'd known each other forever. You know who she is, you see her name in the papers all the time—plays tennis, shows horses—Ishtar Lane."

"Oh, yes, I know," Linda nodded. "I know *all* about him, everything I could wring out of everybody. But I told you before, Ted, dear, that I do *not* want him for a model husband. I *don't* want him to reform. I want him to give me no end of cause, and I want the sympathy of the world—all but yours, of course—and the biggest kind of alimony. Now, *will* you help me?"

"It think it's perfectly awful, I do, honestly," said Teddy, rising. "I hope to goodness he won't look at you. It would just serve you right if he'd pass you up. You'd look perfectly wonderful in that burnt-orange taffeta with the radium lace. It's a bit big for me, too. You could easily just change a hook or two; and we wear the same size shoe, so you could wear the gold slippers with the topaz buckles. But I don't think it's right. I ought to speak to Con about it."

"If you do!" said Linda, and there was a real threat in her voice in spite of the levity of her words, "I'll never

speak to you again, and you shan't name the twins after me—so there!"

Teddy led the way to the adjoining room, a regal old bedroom, now transformed into a boudoir for the daughter of the house. The place was an orderly litter of tissue paper, boxes of all sorts, dress hangers, and half-packed trunks. In one corner lay an enormous heap of mistletoe, tied with white ribbons. In her interest in her own affairs Teddy for the moment forgot the object of their visit.

"I'm so glad I'm going to have a Christmas wedding," she jubilated. "We can have such unusual decorations. I'm going to have mistletoe with the lilies of the valley in my shower bouquet, and there'll be a perfect forest of holly in the dining room."

"Yes, and your anniversary present will be your Christmas forever after," said Linda practically.

Teddy pounced upon a hatbox of striped black and white adorned by floral ovals of cubistic design. She untied the tape knots and, taking off the cover, revealed a mass of rainbow-hued silk paper, which she tossed aside with a deft hand.

"It's a perfect duck of a hat—black lace and an orange paradise—there." She placed it caressingly on Linda's brilliant black hair. "Gorgeous!" she exclaimed. "Perfectly gorgeous! That's for the wedding. My dear, if you wear that lid I might just as well give up being the bride—*nobody* will look at me." From the top tray of one of the trunks she lifted out a delicate creation of grayish silver clouding a shimmer of bronze gold.

"Well, you can give up being looked at just for once—~~you've~~ you've got nothing at stake!" Linda took the evening gown and held it up, patting it into place at the waistline.

"Not a soul has seen *that* one," Teddy explained, "not even the family. It's too outré; I didn't dare. I bought

it on my own, but it's a Bouée Soeurs. Here are the slippers and the stockings to match. I'll have Adonis take it all over to your house after dark to-night. Now, let's see, for the wedding—the café au lait—no—you're too bright colored for that. There's an old-rose chiffon—just the thing with that hat— Oh, peaches! You'll have to let it out, I'm afraid, but you can fix it afterward and express it all on to me. I won't need these until we get back from Quebec—there, I didn't mean to tell where we were going to honeymoon, but I don't mind your knowing, dear." She turned and with childlike affection kissed her companion. Linda felt a quick touch upon her heart.

"Ted," she said seriously, "I'm very fond of you—and don't think it's because of all I get out of you, either." Teddy started to protest, but Linda went on: "Why, I've never in all my life felt sore at you for having all the things you have. I've been *glad* you've had 'em—and you may not think so, but that's saying a *lot*. It's awful to have the taste and the knowledge, and be young and good looking—and *poor*. It's made a horrid, hard, cold-blooded fish out of me, and I know it! But just you wait till I'm a fashionable, rich divorcee! Maybe you won't be proud of me! There, now! I'm going, and one hundred thousand thanks!"

Again Teddy tried to dress the facts to suit her conventions. "Oh, I do hope he'll fall dead in love with you. Won't it be *wonderful* to have you the wife of Con's best friend!"

Linda laughed ironically.

"*Fairy tale*, yes. I'll be over to-morrow to help you arrange the presents. When does *he* get here?"

"Con? Coming to-night. He's going to stop at the hotel, but he'll be over in the morning, the lamb-angel."

"No," said Linda, reluctantly taking off the hat and laying it gently in its rainbow bed, "I don't mean your angel-

lamb Conrad; I mean *my* black sheep Roland Bland."

"Oh," said Teddy, crestfallen, "he won't get here until just before the dance, Christmas Eve."

Linda nodded.

"And I'll be there to meet him with Christmas bells on. 'By, petty, and be sure and get rid of *all* the love letters. It pays not to advertise—sometimes." At the door she turned and kissed her hand.

CHAPTER II.

Roland Bland looked up as he finished settling his dress tie. He was tall and lithe, with the powerful grace of movement that is to a man what vivacity is to a woman. His lean face was handsome in an adventurous, devil-may-care sort of way. The broad, low brow and the fine, Napoleonic eyes gave the lie to the hard-cut lines of dissipation from nose to mouth, and the curve of the lips that spoke of rapacious living. He looked and acted as if he did not care a fig for the opinion, candied or otherwise, of any man or woman. Doubtless it was his wealth, as well as his dominant personality, that made him give the impression, even to a casual observer, that in the bright lexicon of his youth there was no such word as refusal. Just at the moment he was at his best, the almost predatory expression of his face softened into affection as he looked at his friend, Conrad Fontaine.

The groom was of a different type. He was pink cheeked and clear eyed, but to the discerning these qualities indicated the assiduous care of a competent barber, rather than early hours and fresh air. There was just a suggestion of heaviness in his tall figure.

"Connie," Bland grinned, "it scares me to see you kick off like this. It brings the awful possibilities close to me—like attending a funeral. And let me tell you, old man, for nobody but

you would I have taken this icy trip to the sunny South, and chucked the whole holiday season; but, of course, it's you, so here I am, little one, and may God have mercy on your soul."

The prospective groom wriggled in the uncomfortable easy-chair of typical hotel design.

"Well, watch out for your own soul, and put in a prayer for yourself. Teddy's started matchmaking already. She's picked out a girl for you. Remember—you're warned."

The news did not excite the experienced Mr. Bland. "Very good of her, I'm sure, but I'll stick to single blessedness. Is my gardenia on straight? And is it time for us to saunter over to your fiancée's abode? If so, vamoose!"

"Right," said Fontaine. "Put on your Italian-conspirator cape coat; you'll need it. It may be the sunny South, but also it's Christmas Eve, and the thermometer has had a drop, even if the punch hasn't. Got your satin lid? Good. Let's go."

Conrad's big car, which was to take the bridal couple on the first stage of their journey the following day, was waiting, and made short work of the distance between the hotel and the old mansion that had sheltered Beaudines from pre-Revolutionary days. Bland observed the impressive, tree-lined approach and the glowing, porticoed entrance with an appreciative nod.

"Grand old place," he commented. "Just the right setting for a wedding; shame not to drive up in a coach and four."

The sound of music floated out to them as the door was opened by the inky and ceremonious Adonis. The great entrance hall was bright with many lights, the walls banked with laurel, huge holly wreaths hung above the mellow-toned portraits. The stair rail was serpentine with smilax, and everywhere, pendent from the ceiling by

white satin ribbon, the waxy clusters of mistletoe swung invitingly.

The arrivals were immediately enveloped by Beaudines—the general and his cousins, daughters, aunts, and uncles. A radiant, green-eyed blonde, quite forgetting her future dignity, hovered at the side of the groom. Greetings and introductions followed, and then the general took them to the floor above to deposit their belongings and be treated to a private "sniffer."

"Put down, gentlemen, nineteen years ago for the express purpose we celebrate to-morrow."

None of the lovely details of the old house escaped Bland's notice. It was perfect in every particular, complete in its unstudied elegance. There was a portrait, in particular, that took his eye, a red-coated officer of the king, painted with the glad ease of a master with a satisfactory subject. As they started for the door again, Bland hung back. The general and his future son-in-law were deep in important consultation of plans for the all-important event of the morrow. They had gone before Bland was aware of it, and he was glad. He had a feeling of expectancy, as if this whole frame of beauty and elegance was waiting for the picture to enter it. There was a sense of unreality, of a dream too poignant. They had come early, as was to be expected. Only the immediate family were assembled. There was time before the ordeal of the ball to look over the old mansion and study its graciousness. The assembled Beaudines on the floor below were very attractive and not unpicturesque. But, somehow, Bland was glad to be alone.

The door to the hall stood open behind him. As he turned away from his contemplation of the red-coated warrior, he caught sight of a magnificent inlaid clock on the opposite side of the corridor, as fine an example of English marquetry as he had ever seen. He moved to the door with the swift de-

light of the connoisseur. As he stepped across the threshold, a door nearly opposite was thrown brusquely open. Two candle brackets on each side of the entrance cast a golden light. Directly overhead an immense wreath of holly was suspended crownwise, and dropping through its center a great, gnarled bunch of mistletoe swung lazily.

With a quick swish a girl came from the room. As she turned to close the door he caught a gleam of perfect white arms, a glossy, black mass of hair, confined by a headdress of crystal that faintly glimmered. Her gown of flame color was clouded in a smoke of dull, metal lace. She was for the instant just a flash of perfect line and color—and then she turned and faced him, directly under the mistletoe.

Instinctively Bland drew himself up, for he felt as if he had been physically smitten. His heart stopped, his breath caught painfully. Never in all his life had he seen anything like this creature before him, never had he experienced such a shock of personality. She stood perfectly still, her immense black eyes fixed on his, her red mouth like a scarlet flower in the snow of her face, slightly parted, as if with surprise at finding him before her. There was an impact of will on will, of desire on desire. He was at once stunned and electrified at the sight of her.

Linda Catherton was shivering with the excitement of concentration as she stared at him—and something else, as well, something that startled her. Rake and roisterer, this man? No! Adventurer, lover—yes!

His next act was characteristic. In one stride he was beside her; his whole being obeyed the impulse of his vision. His arms were about this gorgeous, magnificent being, his lips had sought and found that scarlet-flower mouth. An icy fire flamed through Linda's veins. She was floating on a burning ocean supported by an arm that crushed

her as it held her up. She swayed from him and, with a gasp, he released her.

"My God! I beg your pardon." For the first time in his life he had lost the firm footing of his sang-froid.

She recovered first. A surge of anger came to her assistance, followed by the urge of her firm resolve.

"Very well," she said. "Let us blame the mistletoe, Mr. Bland." He looked at her surprised. She had herself in hand now, though her heart was racing. "Let the mistletoe introduce me, then—since I know who *you* are. I'm Linda Catherton, Teddy Beaudine's most intimate friend."

"May I?" he asked humbly, and raised her hand to his lips. "May I add to the description——"

A noise of little running feet on the stairs, and Teddy's golden head appeared bobbing up.

"Oh," she cooed, "you've met, then? I'm so glad!"

"I think," said the best man quietly, "I've been waiting a very long time to meet Miss Catherton."

That night, as Linda lay in her narrow bed in the room she shared with her two younger sisters, she tried to gather the threads of that night's weaving. One thing was certain. She had set out to catch Roland Bland, and the catching had been most amazingly easy. From the moment of their meeting in the hall he had never left her; he had been her shadow; he had been at no pains to disguise his infatuation. Linda gave herself over to her dreams of the future. It wouldn't be so bad to be his wife for a few years; he was presentable, even good looking; he was never boring; he made love in a manner that made it worth while just to be made love to. The fact that it suggested experience was subtly flattering. Here was a man credited or discredited with a thousand conquests, who found in her something to raise his interest

to white heat. And he had everything to give, all the independence and luxury she wanted. She would be surrounded with beautiful things, every wish gratified; he would deck her with wonderful clothes and jewels and proudly show her off to that glittering circle he frequented. She saw herself queening it as she had always wanted to queen it; not as the small-town center of attraction, but as the bright particular star of a crowded firmament. And yet she quailed a little. Maybe she overestimated the impression she had made; perhaps he always enveloped women in that atmosphere of adulation and adoration. It might mean nothing; he might be glad to amuse himself for a day or two in order to enliven the boredom of the function he was attending out of friendship for his pal.

His sudden, violent impulse in kissing her as he had, might be just another indication of his unrestrained nature. She could not sleep for thinking over the details of her future campaign. Should she be warm or cool to him? Should she play up as the simple country girl or as the woman of the world? The coming day would be the test. She must be at her best; she could not afford one backward step. It was now or never. Unless she succeeded in holding him he would be gone out of her life forever by nightfall. Finally she willed herself to sleep, in fear of the ravages of a wakeful night.

But she need not have feared—helplessly, helplessly, Bland was in love with her. Characteristically, he had not the faintest doubt of himself or of her. Through all the loves of his life he had sought only for love, and now he had found it. That was all, and everything. She was his by right of a mystery he could not name or fathom. In the small hours of the morning, when he had found himself back at the hotel with Conrad, he had frankly announced his intention, and his friend did not laugh.

Instead, he frowned—a look of annoyance, almost of distress, and yet he could not believe that anything so sudden could be really serious.

"Look here!" exclaimed Fontaine warningly. "Don't be a darned fool! You get mixed up with one of these small-town girls and you've got to go through with it." Bland looked at him with such quick ferocity that he was chilled. "Say, you don't actually mean it?" he quavered.

"I do—I never meant anything so much in my life," the hero of a myriad intrigues proclaimed emphatically.

"Damn!" growled Fontaine, and there was real concern and annoyance in his voice and look. "Good Lord!" he continued, "and I've got to leave to-morrow. Gad! I've a mind to stall off the wedding. Lord, man, you don't know what you're getting into!"

"Nice talk from you," retorted the best man.

Fontaine bit his lip, but his eyes narrowed. It was very clear that he did not relish his chum's desire to "marry and settle down." A moment later his brow relaxed and he smiled knowingly. It was equally clear that, misunderstanding his friend, he dismissed the danger as trivial.

The wedding ceremony, performed under a holly and mistletoe bower, was over, and the bride and groom had received the congratulations due. The guests had waved Godspeed to the happy pair, as, with glittering luggage piled high on the rear seat, they had glided in the big, sleek car down the old, tree-lined avenue and turned north at the high brick-and-stone Georgian gates. The guests dispersed, the excitement died down, but Roland Bland stayed on. A week later Linda Catherton wrote to Quebec, to Mrs. Conrad Fontaine:

TEDDY, MY DEAR: There's no question about it—I have him. Don't you ever tell me I can't do what I set out to do. He's been

asking me to marry him every day now, for the last four days. Just as if I had any intention of letting him get away! I tell you frankly, if he were a thousand times uglier than he is, and if he had the devil's own reputation *besides* his own, he wouldn't have a chance. I can't tell you what escape from all this home stuff means to me. Don't be sorry for me and begin platituding again. You know I'm headed for the happy hunting grounds of divorceddom—"the land of the free and the home of the knave"—hurrah! Don't be surprised if I join you in the gay metropolis by the time you get back from your honeymoon. Our reduced family hasn't the price of a blow-out such as yours, but I guess the Reverend Jay Carter can tie us just as tight—or loose, as necessary. And I'll have divorce coupons on my bonds of matrimony—watch me! Oh, my goodness, Teddy, I'm *too* excited.

CHAPTER III.

Linda Catherton was as good as her word. When the Conrad Fontaines returned to New York, they made a four-some at the Ritz with the Roland Blands, while each of the newly wedded pairs went apartment hunting. Teddy had traveled widely, and therefore, to her the environment of the city was not cause for undue excitement; but to Linda this new world was a revelation. It was all wonderful, and she hardly thought of her husband as in any way separate from it. She hadn't married *him*; she had married excitement, emotion, and luxury. She set herself to having a good time with an avidity that amused and delighted Bland. To him she was a wonderful, grown-up child, equally delighted with the gold of the honeymoon and the gilding of a restaurant. If she failed to give him the utter depths of her heart, he was unaware of it. His own absolute devotion, his singleness of love, at last awakened, blinded him, and if he lived in a fool's paradise, it was, nevertheless, a very real paradise.

He found a new and thrilling pleasure in watching her. The mere sight of her spending his money was a de-

light. It tickled his sense of humor to see her astonishment over the lavishness of her new surroundings and her control of any expression of it. He had many an inward chuckle at her adjustment to her competent French maid, her car, and her chauffeur. But in matters pertaining to her own beautiful person she had no need of adjustment. Instinctively she knew her type, and she had a woman's intuition as to dress. To show her off was a sort of triumph. He knew well enough the oft-voiced comment of his world that "no decent girl would marry him"—not only could he show them "a decent girl," but one of enviable lineage, and a peerless, flawless beauty.

It cannot be said that Teddy accepted the quick and complete dominance of her friend with complacency. What she had expected she had never clearly analyzed, but with her own money and social prestige added to her husband's lavishness and popularity, her youth and undeniable good looks, she had expected, in her new environment, to make something of "a splash," as she would have expressed it. She had not counted on being completely blanketed by the Bland-Catherton marriage.

At first she attributed the stir to the general astonishment over Bland's accession to the ranks of the benedicts—that in itself was bound to arouse the comment both of society and the press. It was only to be expected. But little by little, in the months that followed swiftly, Teddy was forced to realize that the sensation created when the four inseparables appeared was not the result of a whispered, "There's the girl that Roland Bland married," but a frank appraisal of the girl herself. When the nine days' wonder kept on being a wonder after ninety-and-nine days, it was obviously because of the ever-renewed novelty of perfect loveliness, for the beau-monde and the demi-monde alike had accepted the astounding fact that

its leading man had retired from the stage—as, indeed, he had, with no regrets and no longings.

But habit is an urge stronger than love or hate, because it, of all the urges of life, travels in disguise; and Connie and Rowly were now as inseparable as they had been in the days of their dissipated freedom. A class reunion was what apparently started the backsliding. Both of the malefactors were contrite, both abjectly apologized to their wives and told them everything they could remember to tell. The incident was closed, but to Linda it was not closed; on the contrary, she suddenly stepped through the door of her own being to a comprehension of herself. Her husband's blurted confidences had touched feelings she had never dreamed he could arouse. She was jealous, angry, resentful, all the things a conventional wife should be. She shut herself up in her new plum-and-blue boudoir, in her gorgeous Park Avenue apartment, and pouted. She was amazed at herself, and deeply, unreasonably resentful of Connie's influence over her husband.

In spite of the fact that she knew better, she found herself trying to exculpate her Roland and throw all the blame on his friend. "Connie had led him on"—"if he'd been by himself, Roland would never have acted so." Knowing better, she hated her own loyalty for trying to deceive her, and deeper and more important, she was frightened. *Could* it be that she could not hold him? Was this the beginning of the end she had foreseen and desired, and that now appeared to her as a terrible, crushing calamity?

Frantically and miserably her husband sought to placate and pacify her, and it was to his immense relief that at this psychological moment Istharr Lane came home from Europe.

He rushed to her for comfort and help.

"Take me up to see her right now," said Istharr.

Bland telephoned his wife to expect him and "the best pal in the world" to luncheon.

Linda had read the papers and noted the arrivals. She understood and was prepared—that is, she was gowned to perfection. But neither of the women was prepared for the other.

Istharr was tall, almost gaunt, with a face fascinating for its irregularity. Her eyes alone, as big, black, and brilliant as Linda's own, had a claim to beauty. She had large hands with a strong, dry-hot clasp, and her clothes, while the last word in tailored elegance, somehow managed to be eccentric. Her scant jewelry of silver and lapis lazuli was baroque and even ugly; and her voice was strangely uneven. She gave an impression as of some one advancing close lipped and stern to the execution of some forlorn hope or the accomplishment of some grim destiny, a quality of gallantry in her high-held head. Her meeting with his wife would have amused Bland had he been in a mood of laughter. Istharr met the perfectly possessed greeting "head on."

"Well, by all the saints, the old man did himself proud!" she exclaimed. "I heard you were beautiful, but how *could* I know he'd snatched the pride of the whole harem! Pardon me just a moment, Mrs. Bland, while I get my breath!"

Linda relaxed and laughed. "You don't know how much I've wanted to meet you, Miss Lane," she said graciously. "Rowly says you're a real pal."

"And Rowly knows," said Istharr, as she took out a battered silver cigarette case, lit one of the small, specially made cigarettes, and settled down in her place at the luncheon table. "Have to smoke, if you don't mind—perfect fiend—yes, Roland knows. We were engaged, you see"—she hurried on, noting the ex-

pression in Linda's eyes—"but that's neither here nor there. I got engaged to him as a sort of steadier—imagine *me* steadying anybody. But he was hitting the highest spots, and he seemed to think he wanted me to hit 'em with him, and I knew he was safe with me. I think, at that, I *did* see him through a bit of hard sledding. There were several ladies on the warpath, and, of course, I stood 'em off. But I'm older than Rowly—and so— Some boy, this chap you've married. I suppose you know it, though."

Linda's face darkened, but in a moment she smiled. "He's not so different from all the crowd. You mustn't forget, *I'm* a bit provincial."

"Provincial—you!" Istharr grinned. "Why, you were born cosmopolitan. Your kind always is. Don't tell me, for instance, that the housekeeper or the butler thought out this luncheon. It's too original and sophisticated. Huh! *You* provincial!—you're not even genuine."

Linda turned quickly and met the strange concentration of the woman beside her. She winced.

"No? Why not?" she asked.

Ill at ease, Roland laughed hastily. "Nonsense, Istharr, you're all off. Linda's the soul of frankness. She's a perfect simp, she's so honest. I wish you could have heard her telling Jeffries he had the manners of a clay eater."

"Don't like Jeffries, do you?" grinned Istharr. "Don't blame you. He's trifling. How about the De Pyne twins—like 'em?"

"Yes." Linda had regained her hold. "Of course, I really like *all* of Rowly's friends, and they have been no end kind to me. I haven't once felt like a stranger or an interloper. Of course, Teddy Fontaine being my friend helped, too."

"Ump!" said Istharr, lighting another cigarette. "You're great chums, aren't you? I haven't met her yet. But Nettie de Pyne met me at the boat. She's

a good little gossip, so I got a sort of social 'once-over.' Known her all your life, haven't you?"

Something in her guest's tone attracted Linda's attention. There was a reflection, but whether it applied to the gossiping propensities of the De Pyne twin or to the relations existing between herself and Teddy, was not clear. It gave her a moment's uneasiness. The next words might have enlightened her, but they were lost in demi-tasse directions.

"I hear you and Connie have been off on the loose again," Istharr remarked, half turning in her chair toward Roland. He frowned, flushed, glanced at his wife and back at his friend. To his surprise, there was no gamin grin on Istharr's face, but a look that he could not fathom.

"Ride?" she asked, turning to Linda abruptly.

Linda smiled.

"What a question to ask a centaress from a stock farm! Of course I ride."

"All right," said Istharr. "Come out with me to-morrow. I keep my string down at Royalton's, on the island. I'll give you a good mount. Is nine a. m. too a. m. for you?"

"Not for riding," said Linda, rising and leading the way to the intimate little library adjoining the dining room.

Istharr accepted the deepest lounging chair, her coffee, and another cigarette.

"Begin to feel about normal now," she vouchsafed. "Takes me till afternoon to get on decent terms with the speaking world. Morning's fine for riding or swimming, but for nothing else. Don't know why I do either of those." She turned toward Roland and held out her hand. "*Am* glad to see you," she paused and seemed to revolve something in her mind. "Yes—it was time I came home—" She digressed. "I've been having rotten insomnia lately. Ever think about having yourself psychoanalyzed, Rowly?" He laughed, but

she did not wait for his answer. "Do you know," she twisted toward Linda and looked at her quizzically through half-closed eyes, "I honestly believe that after a year or so you'll be very happy together, you and Rowly. I believe there's 'the makin's.'"

"After a year or two!" Linda started.

"Yep, if you last that long. But you're an odd combination, you two. My dear girl, you don't know that man. He's a queer duck, and the queerest thing of all is that he's horribly sensitive. Oh, I know he'll deny it, and so will everybody else, but I know, and it's a mighty important thing for *you* to know. And now I'll be going before I talk too much. Explain to her when I'm gone, Rowly, that I'm a bit nutty. Be at the riding club at nine, sharp, Lindy, and I'll introduce you to the equine wonder of the world. Good-by and God bless you." She said the last with so serious a tone and expression that Linda was troubled. It was as if in the woman's heart there lurked some unconfessed fear.

But Istharr's visit cleared the air. Once again the merry-go-round of life began to whirl, but now the tall figure of Istharr companioned them. She was immensely popular, in spite of her caustic tongue and arrogant self-sufficiency.

Quite openly she was watching, the Bland ménage, and her comments were to the point.

"I don't like the Fontaines for you people," she informed Roland. "That little cat, Teddy, is mortally jealous of your wife. It would be different if she weren't home folks. That's just it. The girl she used to patronize on the native hearth has put it all over her. And another thing. You and Connie were pals before you were married—and there isn't an honest, decent tie between you—take my advice and cut them out."

Roland growled at her, but long ex-

perience had taught him not to argue with Istharr.

To Linda her admonitions were even more unconventional. "Don't you fool yourself," she said repeatedly. "You think you're a cold-blooded woman of the world. You're not. You're an impulsive, idiotic child. You've got all sorts of pride and temper—no, don't tell me you haven't. You're headed for some unhappy days, or I miss my guess. You've got to learn to eat humble pie and crow. Trouble is, both you and Rowly think a whole lot of yourselves. Fact is, too, you think a lot of each other and don't realize it."

At first Linda laughed at Istharr's obvious feeling of responsibility; later it became irritating as Istharr arrogated to herself more and more the right of censorship. When, one day, she took her to task for allowing "Buddy" Caldwell, the universal beau, to hang around her, Linda openly rebelled.

"See here, Istharr," she burst out, "I don't know what you're talking about, but—I'll not have you or any one regulating my affairs. If my husband has no objection to Buddy's dancing attendance—and he *does* dance well, you'll acknowledge that—I can't see why *you* try to interfere, and I'll tell Roland so." The outburst had no effect on the self-constituted mentor. She shrugged, and lit another of her eternal cigarettes. They were seated in Linda's boudoir, after a hard ride. Istharr was still in her habit, but Linda, fresh from her tub, was radiant in a negligee that would have been the envy of a moving-picture heroine. The silence and the smile on her companion's lips angered Linda. Her resentment smoldered and eventually found expression.

"While we're being so frank, Istharr, I'll say a thing or two to you. Why don't you stop smoking as you do? You're killing yourself, everybody says it; you're a wreck. Why don't you use some of your critical energy to con-

trol yourself—since you know what's best for everybody else?"

Isthar's pale face went ashen. Her lips were a thin blue line, and the large hand that held her cigarette holder shook. Linda had never seen her show so much emotion, and she was surprised. Isthar pulled herself together with a physical effort.

"You're quite right, Linda; I should. Nobody knows better than I do that I'm playing hob with myself. I've tried to cut it out, and I'm ashamed to own up the habit has beaten me, so far. But I *will* take a brace, just to show you. But"—she hesitated, as if unwilling to say anything that might seem to be a bid for sympathy—"I don't matter so much. I'm alone, and I'm an ugly old grouch. *You've* got beauty and youth and a husband who adores you, and health and wealth, and when you get over being a drunken sailor with your new money and your new city, why, you've brains to *be* something. Really, you mustn't mind my being a nuisance. You and Roland are about all I care for—old maid's children, you know."

"Don't be silly," said Linda tartly. "How old are you, Methuselah—a thousand?"

"Thirty-three," replied her downright visitor. She was silent. "Thirty-three," she repeated, after a long pause. She was holding out her right hand before her and gazing at it with a sort of fearful fascination. Linda noticed that the hand was thinner, paler, too, with a sickly transparency, the joints stood out, and the tendons were as defined as wires. "Pretty young to be on the down grade." The strange voice had fallen to one of its hoarse, whispered cadences. "Pretty young to be so old and so unwise." Her mobile mouth twitched, her jaws seemed to lock in her effort of will, the muscles bulged at the place where they touched the arteries of her throat, and the great veins were dark.

Linda was just a little frightened. "What *is* the matter with you?" Though her voice was sharp, her eyes had lost their angry resentfulness. "Isthar, I declare, you ought to go to a sanitarium and take a rest cure."

"Good God, no!" Isthar sprang to her feet with the jerky abruptness of a jack-in-the-box. "Don't suggest it!" She shuddered. "What!" Her laugh was shrill. "A rest cure? Why, it's my horses that keep me going. I'd die if I gave up trying to ride *them* to death. Don't you bother about me, and"—she fixed Linda with a stare that glittered—"keep away from Ted Fontaine, and if you have any influence with Rowly make him cut out Con. Now I'm off. Going to the little club to-night? See you there. I've promised to go with Bendy." She stopped at the door, turned, and favored Linda with a comprehensive look. "Lord, Linda!" she said, "I wish you weren't so pretty!"

It was the last of Isthar for many long days. She disappeared from her world with singular completeness, and no one was surprised—it was Isthar's way.

CHAPTER IV.

A week—two weeks—passed in which nothing unusual happened, and then, from a clear sky, fell the thunderbolt.

Linda had been up and out for her ride, long before her husband's usual hour for bestirring himself. Now she glanced at the clock—a quarter to one. She pressed the little gold-and-enamel bell at her toilet table and waited.

The maid appeared at the door with a gown thrown carefully over her arm. Linda nodded toward the bed.

"Did you see Cummings?" she inquired. "Is Mr. Bland out? I left so early I didn't even call to him to tell him. Is he lunching home? Find out."

The maid laid down the gown and left the room. She was gone some

time, and when she returned she was obviously reluctant.

"Cummings is outside, madam," she murmured. "Perhaps you had better speak to him in person, madam."

Linda had a premonition of something unpleasant. She crossed to the door and threw it open, as the maid stepped behind her, deftly fastening an extra belt fold. The valet, looking sleek and dark and oily as an undertaker, stood in the hall, nervously clasping and unclasping his hands.

"Mr. Bland isn't home. I—I really don't know whether he plans to be home to luncheon or not, madam."

Linda rebelled. "Surely he left a message for me if he went out after I did this morning. Isn't there a note on his desk? Go look, Cummings."

The man shook his head. "No, madam—he—Mr. Fontaine came about one o'clock last night, called for Mr. Bland with the motor. They went out together. The master said he'd not disturb you, madam; it was your first night home in weeks, and he thought you needed your rest—and—"

Linda controlled herself. "Ah, I see—he was out very late, no doubt. Probably went back with Mr. Fontaine." She addressed the maid. "If you'll get Mrs. Fontaine on the wire, I'll speak to her. That will do, Cummings." She nodded to the valet and closed the door. A moment later the maid handed her the receiver. Linda gave the girl an order that sent her from the room, and, holding her voice in check, spoke quickly. "Teddy—is Rowly with you? No?" Her mounting anger was like a runaway horse that maddens itself by its own headlong rush. Teddy's explanation that neither Connie nor Roland had been heard from, instead of eliciting Linda's sympathy, infuriated her. "Your husband came after Roland at one o'clock in the morning. I don't like it, and if he's

going to do things like that, I'll make Roland drop him!"

"Oh, indeed." Teddy's rancor had been smoldering long; it needed only Linda's angry, accusing voice to enrage her beyond reason. "I don't see what you've got to say about it. You knew jolly well you couldn't tie Roland to your apron strings when you married him. It's your own fault if it doesn't amuse him to stay at home!"

Linda could hardly believe her ears. "Well, even if you have so little interest in your husband that *you* don't care, Teddy, I have some pride."

A mocking laugh came over the wire. "I grant you, my husband couldn't be in worse or more notorious company, but if I'm not complaining—"

Linda did not wait to hear more, but hung up the receiver. Her heart was beating like a riveter. It shook her with its intensity. Her lips felt drawn and tight, her nerves stung. Dizzily she realized not only her unhappiness over her husband's absence, but the dismaying fact that Teddy was her friend no longer. Resentment, bitterness, hatred had sent their subtle vibrations over the wire in that thin, staccato voice.

She lunched alone with a great show of casual, indolent satisfaction. An engagement for the afternoon she canceled. She wanted to be home when her husband returned. Curiously enough, Teddy's attitude had completely changed her own toward Roland. She was determined to meet him gently, calmly to accept whatever explanation he chose to give, and say nothing against Connie until she had him in such a state of contrition that her word would be law. She would laugh it off with him, or she would be tender and hurt. Of one thing she was very sure: she would not mention her telephone conversation. She retired to her boudoir, dressed in her most becoming lounging robe—in which no Roman empress could have looked more regally lovely, opened wide

the door leading into Roland's dressing room, adjoining, and listened while she pretended to read.

Three, four, five o'clock came. Roland did not come, nor did the telephone ring. And now came fear—he was hurt, killed, something terrible had happened. He was in some hospital, perhaps, unidentified. Her imagination pictured a thousand disasters, yet she dared not ask—the police, the doctor, one of Roland's men friends. She could not enlist the aid of any one. To call up Teddy again was out of the question—and yet he had gone out with Conrad Fontaine. It was inconceivable that Teddy had made no effort to locate them. She walked the floor, racked with anxiety—oh, to know that he was all right! She could forgive him anything, anything, if only she could know that he was safe. She knew that the servants must be talking, and it added to her tension. At six o'clock she swallowed her pride and sent for the valet. He had been with Roland for years; he must know his habits, his failings. She realized that Roland might be angry with her for thus calling his servant into counsel, but her fears dominated.

The expression on the man's face showed her how much her distress was apparent. She moistened her dry lips.

"I am a stranger here, Cummings. I do not wish to call on any of Mr. Bland's friends for advice. You have been with him a long while. What would you do—about—about—"

Words failed her.

"About his disappearance, madam? I'd not be anxious, really. It is, of course, unusual," he continued cynically, "but when Mr. Fontaine and Mr. Bland used to go off together, I've known him to be gone for two weeks or more, and never send me a line, ma'am. Went yachting, once, on the spur of the moment, with Mr. Bennings—the whole cruise. It's his way, madam, and Mr. Fontaine's the same."

Feeling, somehow, degraded and small, as if having done a tactless thing, she had managed to do it badly, Linda dismissed the valet. She was in a difficult position. Should she call her hostess and cancel the engagement they had made for the evening, or should she make some excuse for her husband and go? It was her nervousness and anxiety that finally decided her. She had not the courage to sit and wait. She would go. She would make the best of it. If comments were made, she would meet them. Nobody, nobody would have the right to think of her as a moping, neglected bride. She called her hostess, invented an excuse for Roland's absence, gowned herself with more than usual care, and ordered her car.

She was almost surprised to find the party quite unsuspecting of any contretemps, and one person frankly glad of her husband's absence—Buddy Caldwell.

She might, under ordinary circumstances, have been angered by his manner and his instant possessive tone, but to her raw nerves and hidden anger his attentions came as a relief.

The party went from gay to gayer, beginning with dinner and a round or so of bridge and progressing from "club" to "club" as the small hours advanced. Linda found resources of wit and gayety of which she had not dreamed. She felt that she must reëncourage her beauty; she must outdo, outshine herself. Never for a moment did she forget her trouble, the canker at her heart, but to all appearances the presence of her husband had been, in the past, a check on her hilarity. Her hostess observed to Buddy that "Linda, without Roland in tow, was twice the lark." When the party broke up, every one was busily making love to every one else. Engagements for tea and luncheon and bridge were being discussed. Absently Linda laughed with

the best of them, and promised to keep a dozen different appointments of which she recalled not one.

It was Caldwell who insisted on seeing her home, and by right of his assiduousness no one disputed the privilege. He was wise enough to humor the dark mood that ensued the moment she was ensconced in the car. He had not been deceived by her tolerance of his attentions, and he was too genuinely attracted to her to take a chance of offending her prickly temper. He was very charming, deferential, and gentle, and very sympathetic. He managed to convey to her covertly that he felt her underlying distress and was eager to help, and she needed comforting so desperately that she was grateful.

Her excitement deepened as they approached her home. Now, surely, there would be some news. She must be prepared to act, should Roland have returned. She must know just how to approach and reproach him. She was absent-minded in her answers to her escort, but genuinely and frankly glad of his presence. It was all she could do to restrain from questioning the elevator attendant as to whether Mr. Bland had come in, but the question was in her eyes and on her tongue as her maid opened the apartment door at the sound of her key in the lock. She did not need to voice it. He had not come and there was no news. Linda sought her own room and submitted like an automaton to being put to bed. And so exhausted was she, both mentally and physically, that sleep claimed her immediately, in spite of her gnawing anxiety.

She awoke early, and rang for her breakfast tray. Her gay, sunny bedroom seemed to banish fear and trouble. Sleep had refreshed her and she was hungry. She thrust her distress to the back of her mind, ate with a relish, and opened her mail. She would not give in. Doubtless all the wives of

her set had, at some time or other, to face such a crisis. Roland would come back all the more penitent for his greater offense.

She reached for the morning paper and unfolded it. There, smeared across the front page, were her own and her husband's names. Her hand trembled so the paper crackled. Discreetly the maid left the room. Her cheeks burned, her throat contracted, while chill waves seemed to rise and envelop her body. Arrested—a common street brawl, almost at his own doors. No effort, even, to disguise his identity. "Clubman Attacks Taxi Driver"—his recent marriage, her picture, a résumé of his spectacular past. Her soul sickened. It couldn't be true; he wouldn't do such a thing; he wouldn't shame her that way, he loved her too much. But there it was—there was no gainsaying it. A surge of hatred for Conrad Fontaine flooded her. She snatched up the paper again. There was no mention of him—he was responsible for the whole disaster, and he had escaped. Doubtless he had run away and left Roland to shoulder the blame. But this—she read the account again—had occurred the night before, and it was forty-eight hours ago that his friend had come for him. What should she do; what *could* she do? She was in a state of utter collapse. Never had she felt so friendless and forlorn.

Her private telephone rang, and she shuddered all through her strained nerves. Hesitating, she answered. It was Caldwell. She clutched the receiver as if it were his helping hand.

"You'll forgive me, won't you? I don't want to intrude, but I thought perhaps I could be of service." His voice sounded boyish, almost timid, and yet it suggested competence, the knowledge of how to act in a situation that was new and terrible to her.

"Oh, if you *could* come over," she almost sobbed. "I don't know just what

I ought to do to help Roland—it's so awful! Oh, thank you so much. I'm all at sea. In half an hour, *please*. I—I can't thank you enough."

Suddenly the thought of Istharr crossed her mind. Why hadn't she called her at once? She felt guilty in Istharr's eyes for accepting Caldwell's aid. But this was no affair for a woman to handle; it must be a man, a man of their own circle. Connie was out of the question—who else then? She took up the telephone again and called Istharr's number. Some one with a foreign voice answered. Miss Lane was away, to be gone several weeks. Where—where would a telegram reach her? The foreign voice again. "Really couldn't say." For a moment Linda had a flash of strange relief. Subconsciously she feared Istharr's cynical "I told you so." Then a ridiculous suspicion glided into her mind. Had Istharr been with Roland? She pushed the thought from her and rose hastily. She must dress and be ready for whatever there was to do—Caldwell would be there in half an hour. In an astonishingly short time she was dressed and ready for the street. She ordered her car and tried to set some sort of order in the chaos of her mind.

When Caldwell arrived, his matter-of-fact efficiency steadied her. He had the advantage of age—he was older than any of the young crowd he frequented, more self-possessed, more experienced. Linda clung to him with a sense of safety and relief. His first movement was to unpin her hat gently and lay it on the library table.

"No, Linda, we're not going out—at least, *you're* not."

She subsided wearily into an armchair and shakily held the newspaper toward him.

"My dear child," he smiled reassuringly, "I saw all that, and more besides, and I've made a few inquiries. Of course, I'm not excusing Rowly for one

moment. He has treated you shamefully, but it's not so bad as all that. He got out on bail, and he is over at the club now."

"Did he send you? Did he ask you to tell me?" she asked eagerly.

Caldwell shook his handsome head, and his brown eyes, very warm and bright, reassured her.

"No, I'm afraid he didn't; I'm on my own because—because, well, I don't think he is capable of realizing in what a position he has placed you, nor how little able you are to cope with it. But, and here's the point, do you want me to go over to the club and see him for you?"

She looked at him, puzzled. "Should I? What *ought* I to do?"

"Well," he hesitated, "I know that if I were in his shoes I wouldn't know whether my wife were willing to have me come home or not. You can tell me to tell him either to 'Come home and be forgiven,' he laughed lightly, "or—well—" He looked at her anxiously.

"I want him to come home, Buddy," she almost begged. "Tell him I won't say a word, tell him I know it was all Connie's fault. Tell him I've been just sick with worry— Oh, tell him *anything*, only get him here just as soon as you can!" She was amazed at her own vehemence. She rose, laid a trembling hand on each of his broad shoulders, and looked at him tearfully. A low, ugly laugh made them both turn. In the doorway stood Roland Bland.

With a cry of mingled relief and fear Linda sprang forward. "Oh, Rowly," she cried, "I've been *so* worried."

He waved her back, and something in the cold pain of his eyes stopped her short. Whether drink or human agony distorted him, she could not guess. But he was changed—different, repellent, terrible. His face was livid and furrowed deep, his eyes, though they blazed with anger, were veiled as if

with long lack of sleep. His hand trembled and his clothes were in disorder. He laughed again, a strange, brittle sound. Then he spoke.

"Understudying my part in the comedy, Caldwell?"

The insult was so deliberate and uncalled for that Linda stepped back with instinctive fear. Caldwell slipped forward quietly.

"I came here to tell your frightened wife that I'd learned you were at the club, and to ask her if she wanted me to go for you."

Again Bland tittered; the silly giggle issuing from blue, drawn lips was sinister. "*She sent for me? What for? She doesn't want me.*" He lurched through the door and threw himself into a chair. "You can go now," he ordered. "I want to talk to her. You can come back when I'm gone—"

Caldwell turned to Linda with a quick look, which she answered by a swift gesture of dismissal. He hesitated.

"If there is anything I can do—" He began lamely.

Bland cut him short. "There is—get out!"

Caldwell indicated behind Bland's back that he would remain within call, and Linda, directly facing her husband, dared not speak or manifest her wishes. She wanted above all things to be alone with Roland—to clear up this dreadful situation was all that mattered.

"Close the door as you go out," Roland sneered. The latch clicked obediently.

"Oh, Roland," Linda burst forth, "I have been frightened half to death. Where have you been?—no, I didn't mean to ask you—but why not telephone me—send me a message? You don't know what I've been through!"

He looked at her, staring through the narrowed slits of his inflamed lids; his mouth worked. He was making a frantic effort at self-control.

2—Ains.

Linda, her arms extended in pleading, advanced close to his chair.

"Don't, don't, please, ever disappear like that again. I couldn't stand it. I—I imagined all sorts of things."

"Well, I guess you were about right, at that." He thrust the words at her like a rapier, and she started away from him as if the point of the sword had reached her heart. He leered in an effort at effrontery. "What do *you* care? I'm doing everything you wanted me to do. I'm playing into your hand. What more do you want?"

She gazed at him blankly. "I? What I want you to do? Rowly, what *are* you talking about!"

Again he laughed, that awful, cackling laughter that chilled her blood.

"Well, and I'm going to go through with it all the way, and the sooner you play your hand the better for everybody."

"Oh, Roland," she begged, "please, *please*—I don't understand— You're ill; let me send for Cummings to take care of you—you're not yourself!"

"Oh, yes, I'm myself—I'm getting back to *being* myself. I thought for a fact I *had* changed for good, but—you had my past performances all on the dope sheet, all right. You knew I'd run true to bad form, and, by God, you're *right*!"

Linda leaned both hands on the table for support. She felt as if the blood were being drawn from her veins. A terrible suspicion numbed her mind.

"I see you don't answer," he went on, his voice low and tense now, his body huddled nervously on the edge of the chair. "Sounds sort of familiar, doesn't it? By Jiminy, you had me fooled—oh, it was one on me, all right. I bit. I got caught—and I'm going to go right through with it. You win—freedom, alimony, the whole works! You'll have all the evidence in the world, and the world will have it, too."

No half portions on this order!" His voice rose.

Linda was on her knees beside him. "No, no, no!" she sobbed, "it isn't true—it isn't true, it isn't—it isn't. I love you, I do, I do, with all my heart and soul, I love you—whoever told you that lied—it is a lie. Oh, Roland!" She tried to catch his hand clenched upon the arm of the chair, but he snatched it away, and for a moment his clenched fist hovered above her head. Then he thrust both hands deep in his pockets.

"Who told me?" He was not looking at her; his eyes were fixed on the mantel clock. "Who told me?" he repeated. "You did. I have your letter, in your own handwriting."

Linda sprang to her feet with a gasp of rage. "Teddy!"

"Oh, I see you recall the document. Well, let me tell you, you're damned silly to *write*. Keep out of black and white. Let this be a lesson to you. You'd better exercise the caution I shan't in future. So now we understand each other. You are going to get that divorce and that alimony, right off. Never fear; you can get it *now*, and you'll have more cause to-morrow and every day thereafter!"

Linda raised her white, agonized face.

"Roland, look at me, look at me," she implored; "can't you see that I *do* love you?"

He continued to stare at the clock, and his face was expressionless.

"I own up—I did just that. I tried to get you to marry me. I knew your reputation. I meant to use it—it's so. But that's all gone—gone, I tell you. I love you—I do love you—I don't want anything but you. And I *won't* leave you—I won't! I'm your wife, Roland, and you can't drive me away from you—you can't! You can't! Whatever you have done or do, I forgive, because it's *my* fault. But I'm not the same person who wrote that letter, truly I'm

not. Oh, please believe me, dearest; I can't bear it!"

"Oh, yes, you can," he sneered. "You wait and see—this town is going to have something to talk about, take it from me, and if you don't get rid of me, then you've got no woman's pride—that's all!" He rose unsteadily and turned his back upon her.

In one bound she came close to him and flung her arms about him. He wrenched away, twisting from her clasp.

"Save your caresses for Caldwell!" He leered at her. She leaped from him, her natural reaction a murderous fury that died as instantly as it was born. This, like everything else, was part of the purgatory of her expiation. But the rage that had leaped to life turned in another direction.

She heard her own voice, cold and hard.

"Teddy did this—*Teddy*. We quarreled—because I blamed Con—" But Roland had already jerked open the door and gone out.

Linda stared at the carpet like one in a dream. She could not think; her mind was numb and her heart cold. A queer dizziness rendered her helpless. She could only stand and wonder at everything, at her husband, at herself. Slowly, very slowly, she concentrated enough vitality to move. She made her way out into the hall, her hand before her, groping like a blind woman.

"Can I do anything?" It was Caldwell's voice. He bulked beside her, as if materializing suddenly from nowhere. She looked at him and shook her head.

"Go away," she whispered, not because of any desire for caution, but because her throat refused to vibrate. "Please—go." Somewhere in the distance she heard the sound of a closing door. Somehow she reached the chaise longue of her own little sanctum. A moment later she found herself bathing her face. Then a blank, and she was standing staring at her reflection in the

mirror of the "poudreuse." She did not know this person whom she saw; never had she seen such eyes. They were mad eyes. He had not believed her—Roland, her husband; but that thought faded out before another and more poignant one—somehow he had become possessed of that letter written in a spirit of bravado to the woman who had helped her to the culmination of her ambition. How ghastly! She remembered each word of its damning phrase: "I'll have divorce coupons on my bonds of matrimony—watch me."

The words burned and seared. What evil genius had ever impelled her—and she had meant it, then, in her hard, cold, virginal heart—but now—they were come back to destroy her new-found soul, her real and ardent love. She had winged poisoned arrows that had returned to bury themselves in her own heart. But how—how had Roland come into possession of that letter? The obvious answer was that Teddy had played her false, under the stimulus of her anger; in defense of her indefensible husband she had retaliated by this unspeakable treachery. What could she do to repay in kind? What could ever repay, and above all, what could ever wipe out the sight of that letter from Roland's heart and mind? How could she ever make him believe that she loved him with the single devotion of the one love of a lifetime? She had pleaded with him and he had laughed at her. She had read in his eyes pain intolerable and utter unbelief. Who could help her, who act as go-between? Isthara!

She turned from the mirror at which she had been staring as if hypnotized, ran to the wardrobe; snatched a hat and wrap. The car was at the door. It had been waiting there all day for her orders. She ran down the hallway, snatched her purse from the console, jerked open the door, and slammed it shut. Its clang echoed in her heart; it

was as if she were shutting herself out forever from her own home, from her happiness, from the presence of the only thing she loved. For a moment she wavered, moved to return, but the memory of his bitter laugh, his iron eyes, and above all his firm resolve to give her cause for divorce, determined her.

In the lift she was self-conscious. What were the employees saying? Did they know? How much had her maid and Cummings discussed matters? At sight of her own chauffeur patiently waiting in the car, she quailed. Of course, the personnel of her house knew, or guessed—not all—not everything. But Roland's disappearance, the papers, the shocking story that had been carried broadcast. She did not cower, she did not smile; she entered the limousine with white and frozen dignity, and gave Miss Lane's address. The owner of the foreign voice, who had put her off over the telephone, must be coerced into revealing Isthara's whereabouts.

Before the entrance of the house she descended—oddly enough she had never seen Isthara's place of residence, vaguely she had known that Miss Lane still kept the old family home, that she preferred to do her entertaining outside, frankly stating that the Victorian grandeur of the old house was gloomy and depressing. Now she saw the ugly brownstone mansion, neglected, almost abandoned looking; the steps were crumbling, the big double doors of frosted glass were dulled and grimy. The old-fashioned bell tinkled a summons in depths that seemed as remote as a catacomb. Again and again she rang; almost was she persuaded to turn away, but she persisted, and at length the sound of approaching footsteps on a bare marble floor rewarded her anxious waiting. The door opened and a woman peered out at her.

"Miss Lane is not at home," she wheezed asthmatically. She would have shut the door, but Linda thrust her gold-mesh bag between the locks.

"Please," she begged; "it's important; I can't tell you how important. I'm Mrs. Bland, Mrs. Roland Bland."

The door was opened again, and the woman looked her over with questioning hostility. "Well?" she said.

"I must reach Isthara—I must find her. Tell me where she is and I'll go to her—please. If I could tell you—"

She broke off with a sob of excitement.

"Hum; come in. I don't know where she is, but Tascha, that's her maid, she may; I don't know."

The door was gingerly opened, and Linda entered the cheerless semidarkness of the hall. The servant pushed back hanging curtains incased in bags of striped dust cloth and ushered her into a huge, gloomy room blanketed in white coverings, even to the shrouded mantel ornaments. The carpet was a garlanded atrocity radiating from a blue centerpiece of floral wonders. Linda stood upon its apocalyptic roses and stared, unseeing, about her.

The woman was gone. She could hear the slapping of her slippers on the black-and-white marble of that dismal hall. And this was Isthara's home. Something of the real loneliness of Isthara's lot entered her soul. For a breath she forgot her own troubles in the thought of the gaunt, strange woman who had loved and understood and resigned herself. But in Isthara was her only hope; she must help now, no one else could. She must find her, make her understand that somehow Roland must be made to know and see the truth of his wife's love. And he must be saved from himself, saved from the destruction he was courting in his pain and unbelief.

The ground-glass doors that divided the vast parlor from the equally vast dining room rolled apart, and a woman advanced into the room. She was dressed in black, at her waist was a black silk apron, a lawn collar was the only light touch to her uniform, which,

utterly simple in all its detail, was yet unaccountably foreign. The woman's face was only a pale blur in the twilight of the room till she was close beside the visitor and the blur revolved itself into the countenance of a middle-aged woman, French to the point of caricature—a beaked nose; black, intense eyes; black hair banded with gray, pulled back from a square forehead to end in a curious, puffed coiffure. Small, gold earrings glittered like a pair of wide-apart yellow eyes. Her mouth was firm and secretive, but over the whole mask was written loyalty.

"Madame?" said the apparition.

Linda recognized the voice at once. The strange, foreign woman, the huge, shrouded room, impressed her balefully. What could she do or say to move this creature to tell her anything that she did not wish to reveal, and Linda, somehow, was certain that Isthara's whereabouts were a mystery—something that both these old women sought to cover and conceal—why, she could not divine.

"Madame," said the woman again, "I am Mademoiselle Lane's maid. The housekeeper tells me you wish at all costs to see mademoiselle. I am afraid, madame, that is not possible."

"But I must, I must!" cried Linda impulsively, seizing the woman's arm. "I don't know how to explain, but perhaps when you know who I am, you will know that Miss Lane would want to see me. I am Mrs. Roland Bland." She felt that only by utter frankness could she gain her point. "I am in trouble, deep trouble. It is about my husband. I must, I've got to find her."

The woman nodded. There was no surprise in her strange, sphinxlike eyes. "I regret, madame, but mademoiselle is in a retreat. She left orders that on no account is she to be disturbed. She is not well. Perhaps you know she is under the care of the doctors. Madame must realize that what she asks is impossible."

"I tell you," Linda insisted, "I must see her. I tell you that if you don't help me, she will never forgive you—*never*. If you are devoted to her, and I think you are, you will be serving her if you'll help me. Oh, how *can* I make you understand!"

The woman hesitated, but it was not the hesitation of one about to comply; it was the hesitancy of one fearing to reveal too much.

"Madame," she said carefully, "it is not for me to understand what madame wishes, but the wishes of mademoiselle have been made very clear. I regret, madame, I deeply regret——"

Then Linda surprised herself. She burst into tears, she wept with the complete abandon of a child, terrible, rocking sobs choked her. She tore at her gloves with nervous frenzy, her whole body contracted and jerked in an ecstasy of nervous pain. Her resistance had broken; the strange, dulled daze into which her disaster had precipitated her was shattered. A look of fright came into the woman's eyes—fright and comprehension, and with it a deep femininity, a motherliness that wiped out the still restraint of the trained maid. She reached out a strong, competent hand and steadied Linda's reeling form. She spoke, and her accents held the stricken girl's attention as a physician takes the responsibility from his patient.

"Come—come with me, madame—to mademoiselle's room—to rest. I know you have had a shock. I am a good nurse. Let me take care of you as I would of mademoiselle. Mademoiselle trusts me, has always trusted me. *You* may trust me, too. Come."

Uncontrollable tears streamed down Linda's cheeks. Shaking still as if, in the grip of a chill, she succumbed to the insistent, enveloping motherliness. She leaned against the maid as she slowly led her out into the dim, echoing hall, up the long, dark stairs with its bronze gaslight statues at head and

newel posts, along a musty upper corridor, and into the big, square front room. Because physical resistance was beyond her, she suffered the maid to take off her hat and outer wraps. A firm, gentle rubbing, the caress of a soft satin negligee, that by its fluffy daintiness seemed to deny Istar's tailored ownership, soothed her. Her great cap of wound hair was unbound and brushed, her aching, swollen eyes were blinded and soothed with moist, cool, scented cloths. Gradually the rocking seas of emotion subsided. Exhausted and relieved, she lay quiet. The scientific knowledge and almost divination with which the attendant handled and soothed her aroused her wonder. Was Istar ever like this—a nervous, hysterical wreck? She remembered that last interview. Some mystery lay behind Istar's life, or lay embedded in it. With all her caustic frankness, Istar was a creature remote from her kind. These were the first coherent thoughts that came into Linda's mind; their coming was assurance that self-possession was returning.

"If madame will rest now a little—it is the nerves, I know. In a half hour I will bring some tea, or a little sherry, perhaps. Now, madame is better. With silence all will be well."

There was the gentle sound of a softly closed door. Linda sighed and relaxed, tried not to think, and failing that, tried to think coherently. Suddenly she sat up. By an accident that might be providential she was in Istar's own room. Here might be some clue to her present whereabouts. She gathered the negligee about her and rose to her feet. She groped along the walls till she found the electric switch—not realizing that daylight still lingered out of doors. The room became visible in all its intimate detail. The furniture was beautiful, museum pieces of the most delicate Louis XVI French period. A breath of decadent Versailles, feminine,

sensuous. Linda was amazed. Was this the boudoir of Istharr Lane? As soon expect a spider to spin Valenciennes lace. The bookshelves reflected more of the woman she knew; but here again was a puzzle. Shelf after shelf was given over to the lore of the Orient. Shelf after shelf of mere fairy tale and folklore, that and blatant, glittering romance. In spite of herself, in spite of her quest, Linda paused to observe and wonder.

The immense bathroom adjoining was a revelation and yet intriguing. It had been made over into the brightest and most elegant of Roman natatoriums—mirrored and tiled and decorated; silver dolphins for waterspouts, blue-mosaic walls, and cabinets of essences, scented crystals, soaps and perfumes, towels of linen, toilet trifles of gold. The shrine of a beauty cult, a priestess of Astarte could have demanded no more elaborate and costly altar for the rites of purification. A white-enamelled chaise-longue occupied the end of the room, near it a little glass-topped table held a Benares box of carved silver. One of Istharr's eternal cigarettes lay beside it on a black glass tray.

Linda roused herself from her almost hypnotic contemplation. At any moment the maid might come back. If she were to find where Istharr had hidden herself, she must make the most of the opportunity. A glance at the laden toilet table showed no scrap of paper, nothing but orderly rows of oddly beautiful personal belongings. Across the room a wide secretary-writing desk of buhl design spread its inviting length. Here were writing materials, a bill file, letters, and notebooks—it was so easy and obvious that a sigh escaped her—a heap of letters, re-directed in a cramped, foreign writing—"c/o Doctor Trowbridge, The Lindens, Airyville, Connecticut." The woman had told her "mademoiselle" was in the doctor's care. She was here, then.

With the knowledge came the nervous drive of all Linda's energies. She must lie quiet, must wait for the return of the maid as if she had never moved from the bed. But then, as soon as she could escape without arousing suspicion she must make for Airyville. The car? No; by train. The car was a very obvious, highly colored affair. It would only attract attention. She might have difficulty in obtaining admission, if the place was a sanitarium. A visiting card of Istharr's? She sought and found a box in the drawer of the secretary—wrote "Admit bearer" above the name. With trembling fingers she abstracted two letters from the bundle awaiting remailing. She could, if necessary, plead the importance of their personal delivery. She found her purse where the maid had laid it on the center table, thrust her finds into it, switched off the lights, and crept back to bed, forcing herself to lie and wait.

Fortunately for her it was not for long. A tap on the door announced the return of Tascha. She tiptoed over and nodded approval as Linda opened calm and grateful eyes to hers.

"Madame is better? I knew she would be. See, a cup of camomile tea, such as we drink in France for the nerves." Linda obediently drank the infusion. "And now I will help madame to dress, if madame will be so good as to sit in the little chair before the dressing glass. I will see that madame shall look like sixteen—yes, like sixteen—beautiful ladies should not know tears." She smiled.

In those expert hands Linda was coiffed, powdered, and primed, buttoned and snapped and "turned out." Linda hesitated; it would never do for her to appear to give up. She must stick to her rôle. Accordingly she resumed her appeals, but while she obtained sympathy and respectful commiseration, she obtained no information. Hugging her knowledge and fearing to

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reveal it, Linda simulated defeat. She appeared to be near tears again as she was led to the door once more, and conducted to the dilapidated "stoop."

"I deeply regret, madame." The kind, understanding gaze of the wise black eyes followed her down to the car.

Linda had herself driven to the Grand Central Station, dismissed her car, told the chauffeur to report at the apartment that she was dining with friends, and hurried to the rotunda. At the information booth she learned that her train left in a few minutes. She bought her ticket and hurriedly boarded the train.

Isthar had somehow become fixed in her mind as the one hope of mediation. If Isthar were ill, she could send, for Roland and he would surely come. If Isthar were able to return to the city, she would bring her back to the apartment. Roland would listen to Isthar, if only she, Linda, could convince her that their future depended on bridging the terrible chasm that had opened between her husband and herself.

CHAPTER V.

It was after eight o'clock and black night when she descended at the little station of Airyville. She found a hack, and had herself driven down a village street, across an echoing bridge, and out to a wall-inclosed villa of many and brightly lighted windows. At the main entrance she was met by a white-clad nurse. Her inquiry for Miss Isthar Lane brought an odd light to the woman's eyes. If Mrs. Bland—she glanced at the card Linda handed her—would step into the doctor's office? With a beating heart Linda followed. A moment later she was facing the keen, blue eyes of an elderly gentleman of professional manner.

"This is a bad time to call on a patient, Mrs. Bland; quite against our rules."

"It's important." Linda's black eyes gave him no doubt as to the importance. "Here is a card from Miss Lane—in— in case I needed it to gain admission, and here are two letters that require her personal attention."

"Ah," said the doctor. "Pardon." He took the letters, tore them open, and shook out the contents. Linda's eyes opened in surprise, but the doctor, intent on the missives, did not see her. "You understand, of course, that we have to be very careful with the patient. I regret to say that, in spite of all our vigilance, she obtains it somehow, notwithstanding the fact that she is bitterly anxious to be cured of the habit." He sighed.

Linda's heart contracted. "The habit!" So that was it—those cigarettes were—doped! She felt she must speak, must make her surprise and concern evident. "In the form of cigarettes?" she managed to articulate.

He nodded. "Yes, for years that way; lately she has been smoking— opium. However, if the nurse goes with you, and you make no attempt to approach her—but—I fear you will not be very happy in the interview. She has had a bad day." He signaled to the nurse, nodded, bowed to Linda, and turned to his desk. "Not more than ten minutes, nurse," he said decidedly.

"Sorry," the attendant murmured, "I can't leave you alone—I can't even take you into her room. You'll have to talk from the door."

A moment later Linda stood in a small anteroom of a private suite. The nurse opened a door and entered. Linda, standing outside, saw in the bright light of the overhead cluster of electrics the vision of a neat, white bed, a white chair and table, and propped up on pillows, a haggard face that gazed blankly into her own.

"Isthar!" she cried involuntarily. The staring eyes met hers with a curious calm.

"Hello, Linda. Found me out, did you?" The voice was colorless.

"I must—I *must* speak with her alone," Linda begged of the nurse.

"Sorry—we can't, you know."

"They won't let you, Linda," Istharr spoke. "I came here because you put it up to me to make a last effort. Well, you didn't know you were putting it up to me, of course. I don't know how you got to me, or why, but you did." She glanced at the nurse. "But don't mind her; she's used to melodrama—tell it."

As in a dream Linda spoke.

"Istharr, what am I going to do? Roland has left me." She struggled against her mounting hopelessness and fright. "You—he'll listen to *you*, Istharr. If you can't go to him, send for him to come to you!"

"And see me like this—my God!" The words were whispered, but they rang with panic.

"He got hold of a letter of mine," Linda went on doggedly, "one written before we were married, to Teddy—Mrs. Fontaine. I *did* marry Roland to escape from poverty and the little town I hated. I *did* marry him in cold blood, bragging that I'd be free in a year and be a fashionable divorcee with big alimony. I did deliberately *trade* on his bad reputation. It's true. But I swear it isn't true now. I love him, but he won't believe me, and he's gone mad—he's killing himself—he's disgraced himself. He has told me to take all I bargained for and get out. He even says he'll shame me into leaving him. But, oh, Istharr, if you'd see him and make him understand!" Linda stopped short. A change was coming over Istharr's face. It was as if a sponge were being passed across her features, eradicating all human expression—only the agate eyes seemed still to live.

"Is there *any* hope for her?" Linda turned to the nurse and caught her warning look.

"Of course," she said cheerily. "We'll have her in fine shape in a month, and she'll help us, I'm sure."

Suddenly Istharr struggled to a sitting position, her face took on the set, rapt look of an oracle.

"Linda," she gasped, her breath coming in short, painful intake, "I—watch out for Con—I've been watching him. He can't fool me. He's a snake—you are in his way, Linda—watch out! I can't—now. I know I'm right," she laughed dryly, "but I *was* all wrong about poor old Caldwell. He's a good friend. Oh, I knew you and Roland were headed for something. Roland is a fool; tell him so—so are you. But I—I—I'm the greatest fool of all!" She threw up her hands in a gesture of tragic impotence and collapsed upon the pillows.

"You see," said the nurse sadly. "Sorry, you must go now."

In a daze Linda suffered herself to be conducted back to the doctor's office. As in a dream she heard the diffident voice of the nurse.

"You mustn't take what she said to you about—about people—too seriously, Mrs. Bland. We never can be sure of anything, you know."

The blue-eyed doctor looked up at the visitor. "Ah," he said, smiling, "you've had a shock. I was afraid you might. Nurse, aromatic spirits of ammonia, please. Let us hope that we can help Miss Lane through her trouble. Did you keep your cab? Good. You can make the ten-forty-five and be at home before midnight." Linda obediently drank the milky liquid the nurse handed her. "Can we offer you something to eat? But, of course, you had your dinner before leaving the city."

Linda nodded listlessly and turned away.

"Good night, doctor," she answered.

"Thank you for admitting me."

The nurse saw her to the taxi, tried

to think of some heartening word to say, and failed.

Linda felt weak and physically ill. Blow on blow, her powers of resistance were being battered down. What to do now—whom to go to? The long wait in the empty, dingy station seemed endless, the trip in the train, a nightmare of sound and sight—people, people who didn't know and didn't care—people who looked at her because she was beautiful and her hat and gown were modish and conspicuous—people she hated because they were alive and there to see her unhappiness. The Grand Central Station was a bedlam through which she seemed to crawl. She was too weary to hurry. She was afraid to go home, afraid to face those empty rooms. Roland would be gone, that was certain. To face the commiseration of the servants, the sleek pity of Cummings. She shuddered, and yet—home was the only place where she could hope to have news of him. Deserted or not, it was home.

She was deposited at the ornate entrance of her house, too tired to observe the embarrassment of the doorman, the hesitation of the elevator boy. They could not refuse to take her up, and she did not see the attendant cross quickly to the telephone as the cage ascended with unwonted slowness. She inserted her key in the familiar door, pushed it open, and stopped short. Loud, shrill laughter echoed from the drawing-room. Some one was playing a furious fox trot on the piano. There was an excited feminine scream, and a full soprano voice began to sing:

"Baby, li' me up, an' kiss me."

She tried to turn away, to reach the stairs to the mezzanine, to find her room, but her feet led her, as in a dream, down the corridor. Her fingers found the chiseled silver knob, she turned it slowly, her eyes wide and set for the vision of what lay beyond. So softly she opened the door that the party within had not heard. On the

wide window divan Roland sprawled, his head in the lap of a bobbed-haired girl, whose evening gown of silver tissue was a mere disordered wisp. At the piano a youth banged away, on either side a young woman of no uncertain cast. Another couple occupied an easy-chair together. From behind the door to the dining room came giggles and the sound of clinking glassware.

A sob of despair broke from Linda's constricted throat. She wanted to turn and run. She could not; she could only stand statuelike in the middle of the floor.

They became aware of her presence. It was like the bursting of a bomb of silence. The group at the piano involuntarily clutched at one another. The couple in the chair fell apart. Roland alone did not stir, did not look toward her. The bobbed-haired girl twisted from the divan and sprang to her feet.

"My God!" she gasped. "Oh, my God!" She stood there a long moment, her wide, china-blue eyes fixed on the tragic figure before her. Then she whirled on her host like a silver cloud of fury. "You're a rat, you are—a rat!" Squaring her delicate, white shoulders, she marched straight to Linda and faced her courageously. "I beg your pardon, missis. We've no right to be here. We shouldn't have come, but he lied to us—to me. I'm—I'm horribly sorry, believe me. I wouldn't have this happen, not for nothing!"

Linda was vaguely aware of others, men and girls coming from the dining room. A sort of fluffy panic was in progress. Still Roland lay sprawled on the divan, smoking and regarding the ceiling as if he were alone in the room, enjoying a quiet cigarette. Was the smoke drifting so densely—obscuring everything—or was it getting dark, she wondered. Were the electric lights dimming—going out— Then she

heard the sound of a fall, and became aware that she was down on the floor. In a moment she opened her eyes. In some unaccountable way she seemed to have changed places with Roland, for now *her* head was lying in a silver-tissue lap, and over her bent a cloud of bobbed-blond hair and a pair of terrified china-blue eyes—then came merciful oblivion.

CHAPTER VI.

Linda recovered consciousness in the darkness of her own room. She could not guess whether she had been unconscious for minutes or hours, but during that interval her mind had, somehow, been active. She awoke with a determination. There was one person she must find and face—Teddy Fontaine—and she must ask help of Caldwell. He could keep in touch with Roland. As for herself, even the hideous situation she had faced last night, this invasion of the sanctity of her home, even that, was part of the bitter payment the fates were exacting from her. Coward she might seem and shameless to endure and remain, but endure and remain she would.

She lay wide-eyed in the soft, perfumed silence, thinking, revolving the situation. Ever and anon her heart squeezed by pity for that other tragedy not her own upon which she had stumbled. The ghastly, drawn face of Istar on the pillows, her agate, opaque eyes, the tense crookedness of that twisted mouth. Poor Istar—of her suffering there could be no doubt. How had she slipped into the grip of drugs? Linda recalled the battered cigarette case with a shudder, the little pile of stubs that always accumulated at Istar's elbow— Poor woman! Was it heart hunger that had driven her to the malefic surcease, or the curiosity of her brain—at once avid of emotion and strangely reticent? Poor Istar! How recreate a broken will? Poor Istar!

Linda's mind wandered back to that beautiful, intensely feminine room her weakness had invaded, and the ministrations, so sadly experienced, of the enigmatic serving woman, in whose touch she had felt something achingly maternal. In all the world Istar had only this woman to yearn over her. In all the great, gloomy house of her ancestors, there was but the one living corner that she had made her own. Linda forgot her own miseries in the sudden comprehension of her friend's loneliness. What would be the end?

Linda crept out of bed, raised the window shade, and looked out. The cold light of a rainy day flooded the room. Eight, the little gold traveling clock informed her. A wave of dizziness warned her that her strength, both of mind and body, had been sorely overtaxed. She was faint from hunger, and emotionally drained. A cold shower proved invigorating. She rang for her maid, ordered breakfast to be served, and proceeded with her dressing. First she must get herself into shape to meet the trials of the day—and what they might be she could not even guess.

Silent and tactful the maid waited upon her. It hurt Linda to confide in the girl, but there could be no ignoring of what had transpired in the household, and she might need service, personal and disinterested. As the deft fingers coiled the crown of black hair about a face beautiful in spite of its wanness, Linda's eyes rested not on her own reflection in the mirror, but on the face of the maid. Moistening her dry lips, she choked back her pride.

"You know, of course, what happened last night."

"But naturally," the woman responded in a matter-of-fact voice. "It was very hard upon madam. I was hoping madam would not get up this morning. Such things"—she paused as if searching for the right word—"upset—flatten one."

"I want to say," Linda went on, "and you may tell Cummings, too, Mr.—my husband is not so much to blame. He is hurt—it is my fault. I did not mean to, but it has happened. I cannot help matters, but—I can understand and accept. And I shall expect you all to—stand by me and him; that is, if you will. I—I can't, of course, ask you to stay in—in such an unfortunate household, unless you wish—but—" In spite of herself a note of pleading crept into her voice. "It is not easy for me—I am a stranger. It is more than—than duty I ask of you; it is help."

"Madam may count on me." Madeleine patted the last coil into place. "And as for Cummings. He is devoted to monsieur. If he could do anything he would; but when monsieur commands, what can he do but obey?"

"Nothing," said Linda quietly. "Now, if you will telephone for the car and give me a hat and a wrap, I shall go out until luncheon."

Linda glanced at the telephone. No, she would call from outside. What she had to ask of Caldwell required secrecy, but she would call Teddy. If she refused to receive her, she must arrange to watch the house and waylay her in public. She got Mrs. Fontaine on the wire.

"Teddy," she spoke quickly, hoping to hold the other's attention and prevent her from hanging up the receiver on the instant of recognition. "I've got to see you—I mean it. I—I beg of you—I'm coming over now—will you see me?"

There was a moment of hesitation, and then a rather shaken voice replied in the affirmative.

Linda smiled at her attendant and, with a gallant squaring of her shoulders, raised her head bravely. A heady wine of purpose mounted to her brain. She would fight to the last ditch for her love, accept whatever of igno-

miny and pain was in store for her, but never swerve from the one goal—to win him back. A swift glance of admiration flashed in her maid's eyes as she attended her mistress to the door.

The drive to the house of her former friend was all too short. She was trying to plan the manner of their meeting, realizing that she must proceed with the utmost caution if she were to gain anything at all by the interview.

Teddy, enveloped in a cloud of multi-colored chiffon, received her in her own little sitting room. There was constraint, yet Linda was keenly conscious of a new quality in Teddy. There was something dazed and hurt, something appealing, like the cry of a child in the dark. The simile came into Linda's mind and she wondered at it.

"Hello, Linda," she said in a small voice. "Take that chair; it's more comfortable. Have a cigarette? Why do you look so funny?" she asked quickly, for at the word "cigarette" Linda had winced.

"I'm full of nerves, Ted," Linda answered. "I'm having a terrible time, I suppose you know." Teddy's eyes veiled as she nodded without speaking. "But there's one thing I don't understand. And I—I don't know whether you can tell me—you remember the letter I wrote you just after you were married, when you were in Quebec? The letter in which I bragged that I'd soon be a rich divorcee?"

Mrs. Fontaine nodded, but her face was expectant only.

"Well, Teddy, Roland has that letter!"

"What!" cried Teddy, startled. "But—but how could he? Are you sure?"

"He quoted it to me, word for word. That—that is what started all the trouble between us. He is hurt, so hurt—and I can't make him believe that it isn't true any more. I confessed, but I told him it wasn't true now— He didn't believe me—oh, I don't blame

him; I wouldn't, either, in his place. I can't blame myself enough. But how did he get that letter? I thought at first that you gave it to him, because you were angry with me, and then I just *couldn't* believe it of you. That's all. And I'm in the depths, Teddy——"

"But, Lindy!" unconsciously the old intimate name came to Teddy's lips, "how *can* it be? Why—why, that letter, if I didn't destroy it at the time, is among my traveling things, in the little trunk in the storeroom. I haven't used that motor kit since. Of course, of *course*, I didn't give it to him. I was angry at you, awfully angry, because you were blaming everything on Con, and Con was telling me he was going out with Rowly in order to keep him out of trouble, if he could. I lost my temper." Linda noted a quick shadow pass over her friend's childish face. "But *that!* Heavens! I'm glad you knew better when you thought it over. But then, *who*, and what for, Lindy? *What for?*"

"I don't know," murmured Linda. "To make trouble between Roland and me. But who would want to; who would have anything to gain by it?"

They both sat silent. Teddy's blue eyes glanced at Linda sharply.

"Have you thought of?"—she hesitated—"Isthar Lane?"

Linda jerked in a spasm of surprise.

"Isthar? No, oh, *no!*"

"Isthar was in love with him—is in love with him, and she's queer, and—well, I don't know just how, but different. If she were jealous, I can imagine her doing almost anything."

"But not things like that, underhand and—treacherous. And, besides, how could she get that letter? You aren't intimate with her; she doesn't hang around this apartment."

"She's got money. She could bribe," Teddy suggested.

"But how, when she couldn't know

such a letter existed? You don't send after something unless you know it's there, do you?"

"Wait. I'm going to look in that trunk. Come with me. I use one of the extra servants' rooms for storing. My keys—yes, here they are."

The two girls proceeded down the corridor and through the pantry to a small room off the service entry. Teddy unlocked the door and entered.

"Here, that's the trunk; you remember it? It's for the motor rack." She unsnapped its clasps and lifted the lid. The tray was littered with scraps, odds and ends, gloves, guidebooks, post cards—the usual litter of a tour. The bottom of the trunk was empty. Teddy stood in thought. "I seem to remember," she said slowly, "that there were two letters from you, and you wired the day you were married—there's the very telegram." She picked up the message from a corner. "I suppose I saved that because of sentiment, but"—she broke off—"wait a moment!" Excitedly she picked up a book that lay in the tray. "I was reading this, I remember, when it came—'The Golden Dog'—ah, here it is." She jerked an envelope from between the pages. "That's it—and—it's *empty!*" She turned wide eyes on Linda, whose face was hard and white. "But how *could* any one have gotten in here, opened that door, this trunk? Known where to look? Linda—why, it just isn't possible!"

"It *has* happened," said Linda quietly.

"But—I'm so glad it wasn't you!" She held out her hand and Teddy clasped it. They stood together like two frightened children, hand in hand, staring at the gaping trunk.

"What will you do? You can't stay in your apartment—you can't stay with him after all that mess in the papers."

"Oh, yes, I must," said Linda. "No matter what happens, no matter what he does. If he kills me, it doesn't matter. I won't desert, that's all."

"Come here, come and stay with me. I'd love to have you."

Linda shook her head. "Thanks, Teddy, just the same."

A look of relief came in Teddy's eyes at her refusal. There had been a moment of evident panic after she had impulsively given her invitation. Linda noted it and did not understand. With all her frankness, there was something baffling in the girl's manner, and there were traces of unaccountable worry. What was it that was troubling Teddy? No little thing, for her temperament was resilient and merry.

"Is Con seeing Roland now, all the time, every day, as they used to see each other?" Linda asked. Again the veiled shadow of concealment passed over Teddy's face.

"Why, yes—I think they do. Con seems to think that he's your husband's guardian, and they have some sort of a business deal on—I don't know just what, but it's very big—and—recent—I think. Con has spoken several times about going to see you, but he was afraid that if he did, Roland would think he was double crossing him, taking your side, and besides, of course, he knows that you blamed him for starting Roland on the down grade—you see, I told him all the things you said to me. He said he wanted things to simmer down a bit before he tried to act as go-between. He couldn't imagine 'what had made Roland go mad'—that's the way he put it. I'm sure he has no idea about that letter being in Roland's possession. That would explain everything, of course. Do you mind if I tell him?"

Linda shook her head. "No, I don't mind—tell him; though, somehow, I can't imagine Roland keeping anything from Con, not when they are off together as they have been. The big thing is that I want my husband to know I adore him; that I understand why he is like this; that nothing, *noth-*

ing will drive me from him. Ask Con to tell him that, whenever he can, and—if he can help me—I'll be so grateful, so grateful." She turned away to hide her emotion.

"I'll tell him," said Teddy softly. "I know he'd do anything for you, Linda—he's a great admirer of yours, and you know how he adores Roland."

Linda shrugged. It seemed to her, in her unhappiness, that she could expect help from no one—she seemed to be walled in—immured in impotence. She took her leave almost absently. The cordiality and renewal of intimacy that had seemed imminent were fading. The two women were almost formal in their farewells. Linda thought of it afterward and wondered, but for the moment she was inattentive to details. At a drug store where she stopped for some trivial purchases she entered a booth and called the club, for it was nearing noon—the hour Caldwell had told her she might reach him there. His voice was warmly reassuring. Of course he would make it his business to learn all he could. But Roland was hardly ever alone; Fontaine was with him all the time; they were inseparable; they were both there now; he had seen them enter not ten minutes before, and Roland looked like death. Linda winced.

"Come to tea this afternoon, Buddy, will you? Come to the apartment—yes, at five."

She returned home. Mr. Bland had gone out, she was informed by Cummings, who did not refer to any of the happenings of the night before. She ate her luncheon dutifully, realizing the strain she was under made bodily recuperation a necessity. She felt that catastrophe impended, there was more trouble ahead. She could not guess from whence the blow would come, but it *would* come, and she must be strong to meet it. She tried to rest, but could not. She thought of going for a drive

in the car—a run into the country, but she could not make up her mind to leave. She must wait, she must be on hand—for what? She could be back by five to receive Caldwell. She compromised on a short walk, but her uneasiness drove her back after a few blocks—the whole long, agonizing day was a calvary of pain.

At last her guest arrived. One glimpse of his face as she entered the library showed her that he had news. She dismissed the servant as soon as the tea wagon was wheeled in, and turned her anxious eyes to his.

"What is it?" she whispered. "Is Roland off again?"

He looked his sympathy. "You can make more out of it than I can, perhaps. Anyway, this is what happened: It was at the club. Con and your husband had a devil of a row. Roland got a long-distance telephone call, and when he came out of the booth he was ghastly.

"He went straight up to Con and asked him something—don't know what it was, but Con got purple in the face and wanted to know 'who the devil dared say such a thing?' I heard Roland say, 'A disinterested party.' The tone was nasty, insinuating. Con came back at him that 'it was a condemned lie, and he ought to know better than to listen.' Said he didn't know to what the other referred, anyway. Roland told him that 'he couldn't grind his ax like that.' And then he turned on him. If I hadn't been listening with all my might I couldn't have got it, for they were talking almost in whispers—but I heard Roland hiss at him—'If I knew it was true, I'd kill you.' Then Con tried to laugh and slip his arm through Roland's. 'Shucks, no woman in the world should be allowed to come between the friendship of men.' Roland looked him straight in the eyes. 'Yes, if the friendship is *real*,' and with that he turned his back on Con and walked out. He passed

close to me, and I never saw a more terrible look on a man's face. Then I went over to Fontaine. I wanted to find out all I could for you. Con was swearing under his breath. I did the mutual-friend thing; told him he 'mustn't go off the handle;' that I 'hoped there was no real trouble between him and Roland.' Con glared at me, told me to mind my own business, and then he went down to the telephone room and tried to find out where the call that Roland had came from—I was in the next booth—but, of course, they wouldn't give him any information. He wasn't going about it right; he was too anxious and angry. But, of course, he *will* find out when he gets to work. But what does all that mean to you, Linda? Do you make head or tail of it? What's the answer?"

She shook her head. A suspicion that Teddy had accused her husband of sending the letter entered her mind. But would she have telephoned Roland and not faced her husband with the charge? And what was there to be gained? She sat staring at her teacup, lost in speculation. But the condition was serious enough, no matter what had led up to it. In Roland's present reckless, destructive temper, any threat, no matter how wild, was a symptom not to be disregarded. She stirred, as if waking from a dream, as, indeed, she was, a waking nightmare of apprehension.

"Thank you, Buddy," she said, extending her hand. "I don't know what to say. But if you can get hold of Roland, hang on to him, stay with him—I'm afraid. He did a thing last night that proves to me that there is no limit to—his madness. I'd have taken my oath that he was too fastidious, too much the gentleman to—but—he did!" Slowly, with difficulty, she told the whole incident, painfully choosing her words—her heart wrung with the vividness of her recollection.

"My God!" Caldwell exclaimed. "My

God—
insane—
The
"Oh,
that
you t
most
alone
I'm—
with
You'l
watch
Budd
"I"
were
"Goo
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leave
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God—and this—to you! He *has* gone insane!"

The thin teacup broke in her hand. "Oh, no, no!" she cried. "Don't say that. I'm telling you because I want you to realize that he's capable of almost anything. I don't want him to be alone; he mustn't be left to himself, and I'm—I'm out of it, and if he's fought with Con—do you see?—he's adrift. You'll have to follow him and keep watch! I—I have no friend but you, Buddy——"

"I'll do what I can." His brows were drawn in anxious puzzlement. "Goodness knows if I won't make a mess of it, but I'll try to be buffer for you—and if that's the case I'd better leave you and go on the trail. But don't be downhearted. No woman with your self-control and goodness can be kept in the wrong for long." He looked at her with clear, unsmiling eyes. "I only wish it had been my luck to have won such a woman. I'd never give her a moment's uneasiness. But all I can do is try to help out. I'll keep you informed. Good-by, for the present."

Linda watched him go. She sat before the tea table as if reading her fortune in the broken cup before her. It was Cummings' soft approach that aroused her. He took the handle of the tea cart, looked up, and hesitated.

"The master has just come in," he murmured discreetly. "He's in his room, madam," he added, and moved silently away.

She sprang to her feet, tense and determined. She must see him, she *must*, no matter in what manner he received her. She tiptoed carefully to his door, stopped, and listened. She could hear him moving about, there was a subdued clatter of small objects. Timidly she rapped on the door.

"Please," she begged. "It's Linda. Let me in, dear. I want to see you."

There was silence. Her heart pounded painfully. She leaned against

the casing, for her knees seemed, all at once, too weak to bear her weight. Would he open the door or ignore her? The door was finally pushed open, and her husband confronted her. He was in his shirt sleeves; on the bed lay a suit case half filled with his familiar toilet articles, a small pile of clothing heaped beside it; on the telephone stand at the head of the bed lay his wallet and automatic.

"Well," he said harshly, "what do you want?"

"You're not going away, Roland?" she whispered.

He looked at her with unwinking eyes—eyes that stared, that looked sick and old. She put out a trembling hand toward him.

"No, no—please don't go—*don't* go."

"You'd rather I'd entertain at home?" he queried. "Like to have me give parties right here, would you? Well, you see, there's nothing new about that now—no jazz to it; got to find something new. Now, if you'll get out, I'll finish packing."

Linda steadied her wavering courage. "Tell me, Roland, why have you and Con quarreled? Tell me."

"How do you know about that?" he demanded sharply. "Ah, of course—Caldwell. Well," he stared at her coldly, "I don't mind relieving your feminine-curiosity. I received a certain letter at the club that was very enlightening. I couldn't imagine to whose kind offices I owed the enlightenment. I never would have guessed. But I had a telephone call from a friend—that friend reminded me of a motive, one I hadn't thought of, and a lot of things became plain. Well, I began to see that Conrad had something to explain. He couldn't, to my satisfaction, and now, having been robbed of my wife and my pal, I think it's time I went off quietly somewhere and did a little stock taking with a view to future plans. Perhaps your little friend Teddy is in it, too. I

wouldn't put anything past a woman, particularly one from your own home town. Good-by."

Linda found sudden strength. She entered the room so quickly that she eluded her husband's grasp.

"I've told you, Roland, I don't blame you for anything. I blame myself. But, oh, my dear, I do love you—I love you! And if I believed Conrad could have done that, found and sent my letter to you—my wicked, blind letter—why"—her eyes flamed—"why, I'd kill him myself—oh, yes, I *would*. But *he* doesn't matter, nothing matters but you; and I love you—I have, ever since we were married, ever since I really knew you. I was only a discontented, envious girl when I met you. I'm a woman now, and—I love you."

He turned away from her. "So I've heard, and from more truthful sources than from you. But I happen not to believe it. Now go on and cut your first divorce coupon from your bonds of matrimony. I'll keep in touch with my lawyers for a time, anyway, or perhaps you'd rather be a genuine widow. Your wish is law, you know."

"Don't talk so, don't!" she implored, losing her self-control.

"All right, then. Get out, will you, and let me pack." He crossed to the service bell and rang. "Ah, Cummings will chaperon me, if you insist on remaining—since you prefer intimate scenes with an audience."

Feeling her nerve deserting her, Linda turned and left the room, her heart and soul sick with frightened misery. She encountered the valet in the hall, and stopped him with a gesture of appeal.

"Don't let him go—don't let him go!" she begged in a whisper. "And don't let him take his automatic. I'm afraid—I'm afraid!" She loosed her clutch on his arm and passed on.

"I'll try, madam," she heard his whispered reply. "I'll try."

In her room once more, she sat by the bed and stared at the wall unseeing. "What to do now? What to do? Teddy—" the thought came once more. "Teddy, could she have sent that message, did she know?" Linda called the number and was surprised to get Mrs. Fontaine at once.

"Have you seen Con? Has he told you about—about the row?"

Teddy's sobbing voice came over the wire. "He—he came in in a terrible temper. He swore at me—he went out again. I don't know *what* to think!"

"Where did he go? Did he say where he was going?"

"He took the car. He told Williams to drive out to the country club in New Rochelle—he—he had an appointment there. Every Thursday night they play bridge. He wanted to know if I telephoned Roland at the club. He wouldn't believe me when I said I hadn't. What *does* it all mean—do you know?"

"I'm terrified," Linda answered. "Roland is leaving—I don't know where he's going. He's packing now. I'll call you later. I don't know what I'll do—I don't know. It's about that letter, my letter. Roland thinks Con sent it anonymously. He says there was a motive for Con's sending it, but he didn't tell me what it was and I can't guess. Somebody, I don't know who, telephoned to him and told him. But *who* could know anything about it, except the person who *did* actually steal the letter? Listen, when Roland leaves I'm going to try and follow him. If I find out anything more, I'll let you know." She hung up sharply, a half-formed plan forming in her mind. She rang for Madelon. "It was plain that the master's departure was not news to the servants' hall. "Go out," Linda ordered quickly, "get me a taxi, and have it wait about four doors down the street."

The girl nodded and hastened out. With fingers that shook, Linda put on a small, inconspicuous hat, selected a

veil and a wrap that concealed her face and figure.

In a few minutes the maid returned, announcing that the cab was waiting. For a moment Linda hesitated; perhaps it would be wise to take the woman with her. Then her natural reticence triumphed—she was best alone. She hurried down to the street and settled herself in the taxi to wait, having nervously explained to the driver that when she tapped on the glass he was to start, following the car that would at that moment be leaving the apartment building. The minutes dragged. If only Roland would change his mind; if only he would reconsider and decide to remain; perhaps he might even relent, ask for her—try to find her. Hope sprang hot in her heart. She was tempted to rush back, but her cooler brain refused to credit the thought. There had been no relenting, no forgiveness, no desire for understanding in his voice or manner—nothing but resentment, bitterness, and hatred.

At last, after what seemed hours of waiting, she saw the doorman summon a passing taxi, and a moment later Cummings appeared, carrying two suit cases. Then came Roland Bland, walking jauntily, to all appearances carefree and debonair.

Her own taxi started, warily following the other's lead. They proceeded to Fifth Avenue, went north, turned into Sixth Avenue at Fifty-seventh Street, and stopped for a moment in front of a drug store. At a discreet distance her driver drew up to the curb and waited. Linda dared not get out and walk by. She did not fear recognition, but she feared that if he came out quickly and got away, her own vehicle might be blocked from quick pursuit and so lose the trail. North again they went, through the park and toward the Drive, to stop abruptly before a large, brilliantly lighted hotel.

Roland got out, dismissed the cab,

3—Ains.

handed his suit cases to an attendant who ran forward from the door.

Linda hesitated. What was she to do? Dare she risk being seen following him in? And yet, unless she kept him in sight, of what use was her determined trailing? She, too, descended, paid her fare, and walked toward the entrance. She paused in the doorway. She felt safe for the moment, as the light of the electric made a glare between the interior of the building and the dark of the street. She saw him at the desk, observed that the hall boy received a key from the room clerk. But after opening the case and taking something from it, Roland handed back the bag to the boy, and, without approaching the elevators, strode quickly down the lobby. She realized with sudden fright that the corridor opened on the next street. She must catch up with him before he reached the exit at the other end—but she was too late. Before she had time to travel the rotunda halfway, he was out through the revolving glass doors to the street beyond. By the time she, too, reached the pavement, he was gone. She saw the starter at the curb, slipped him a bill, and hurriedly questioned him. Yes, a gentleman had just taken a taxi. He had not heard the address that had been given; he had noticed that the car had turned uptown on Broadway.

Her fear made her certain. Roland had gone out to the country club in search of Conrad Fontaine—the automatic—that was what he had taken from the suit case—and, of course, he knew where Con had gone. She had a terrible presentiment that nothing could stop or hold Roland, but there was one thing she could do, only one—warn Con. She must get him on the telephone. She turned back into the hotel, sought the telephone booths, and called the country club. Although she knew that it would take an hour for her husband to reach his destination, she was trembling

with anxiety. There seemed to be unsurmountable obstacles to getting in the call. "Busy wire," no answer, wrong number—all the heartbreaking delays.

At last she got the club and held the wire while incompetent or deaf employees twisted the name incredibly, declared no such person was a member; that there was no Thursday night bridge club; that the gentleman had not yet arrived; and finally reported that Mr. Fontaine had received a telephone call a few moments before and had slipped out.

Not knowing what to believe, Linda almost wept at the contradictory reports. It was most important, she insisted. Was there any one in the club to whom she might speak who would really know? After interminable delays the steward was put on the wire. He corroborated the last information. Mr. Fontaine had received a message and stepped out of the club. Some one else had taken his hand in the card room. He had no idea where Mr. Fontaine could be located—but he couldn't be far—his bag was in the room he had taken, as was his custom on Thursday nights.

She was forced to content herself with what she had learned.

She came from the booth, her senses in a whirl. Somehow she must reach Conrad Fontaine and warn him—not that she cared whether he met with his just deserts or not. But her husband must be saved at all costs. He must be prevented from doing anything rash. The knowledge that he had taken the weapon persistently spurred on her resolution. Roland was also a member of the country club. He might follow Con up, create another scene. If only she could get Con out of the way! Abruptly she made her decision. She would go out there herself. It was a man's club, to be sure, more a yacht and gun club than a country club in its strictest sense. But once there, or near, she could con-

tinue to telephone until she reached him. If only she could forestall her husband.

She called a taxi and urged all speed. All the way out she debated with herself what her next move should be. But she was too confused and frightened to think out definitely the logic of the situation.

CHAPTER VII.

Linda arrived at last. But she shrank from the publicity of appearing at the club. Instead, she ordered herself driven to the Double Eagle Inn. She would telephone again—perhaps send the taxi driver over with a note asking Con to call her at the tavern at the earliest possible moment. On her way, however, she changed her mind. She had thought of another and a better plan. She would walk up through the club grounds, cut across the lawn toward the service wing, and intercept some employee who, for a substantial fee, would make it his business to locate Mr. Fontaine and bring him to her. That, after all, was the most practical thing to do. It might well be that Conrad himself had left word with the telephone boy not to give information, but to say that he "could not be reached."

There was no way in which she could hope to gain admittance to the clubhouse, but for a twenty-dollar note, surely, she could bribe a servant to do her bidding. She entered the hostelry almost unobserved in the midst of a party arriving in three automobiles. She appeared to the enthusiastically welcoming proprietor to be one of them. In the wake of the chattering group of women she made her way to the dressing room, descending again almost at once, as she saw the hall below empty for the moment. She glided unnoticed down the stairs, out to the veranda, and around the drive to the main Post Road. Cars were parked on both sides of the inn, and the blazing lights of its wink-

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ing electric sign made the way bright as day. Outside that circle of light was darkness, but for the usual arc lights along the road. A few private residences intervened, and then the twin stone shafts of the entrance to the club grounds towered above her. No one was in sight. Far along the curve of the drive she saw a red tail lantern glimmer and disappear. The country scents of late autumn hung on the air, for the many acres surrounding the buildings and abutting on the waters of the Sound were left in their natural state, save for the ministrations of the landscape gardener. Here and there along the drive iron posts surmounted by electric lights illuminated the way, but beyond, on either side, there was semidarkness and clump after clump of ornamental shrubbery.

Linda stepped quickly from the blue-stone road to the soft springiness of the turf. Almost at once she blundered into a rustling hydrangea bush, and paused, waiting till her eyes became accustomed to the darkness. She looked carefully about her, striving to fix her direction accurately. A hundred yards farther along was the bridge where the road curved over the inlet; the main approach, she knew, swung in a wide circle up to the porte-cochère. She had attended the ladies' day regatta, and now she strove to recall the details of the environs. There was a service entrance, and a bridge for its use, she remembered, that crossed the water that, moatlike, surrounded three sides of "the island." Cautiously she made her way, bearing toward the left, giving a wide berth to the waiting cars and their chauffeurs. The sounds that issued from the rear of a large annex indicated that it contained the dining-hall dependencies. In that quarter she would be sure of obtaining assistance, but it was difficult to reach. The winding waters of the artificial ponds intervened. She was almost persuaded, in

her haste and nervousness, to return and openly cross the main bridge. Then she came upon a narrow path. There was a pergola of some sort, a marble table, and ornamental benches, dim and gray in the dusk, under the trees. She paused a moment and sat down. Then, almost directly in front of her, she made out the bulk of a rustic bridge and the pale ribbon of a path that branched out from the other side of the star-strewn waters. Here, she thought, was a good place to ask Con to come to her—a spot easily described, "the pergola by the footbridge."

She was quite close to the main house now. On the other side of a high lilac hedge the long windows of the billiard room sent out a yellow radiance. Faintly she could hear the click of ivory balls, was almost convinced that she smelled a faint fragrance of cigar smoke on the air. She would wait here, she decided, after she had found a servant to take her message.

She rose and moved quickly toward the bridge. Something dark lay in the path; she had almost stepped on it. It was a man's soft hat. Involuntarily she stepped aside and almost into a clump of bushes. Her heel tangled in some obstruction; she strove to free it, but could not, and leaned over. Her fingers closed about cloth, her touch recognized the form of a buttonhole. She had stepped on the lapel end of a man's coat. She almost screamed, and went to her knees on the gravel of the path. She twisted away, staring under the overhanging branches of the bush. There was no doubt of it—a man lay there! She could see his face, the position of his hands, three white spots in the shadow. She could make out no details, just the dark bulk of the form lying on its back and the pale triangle marked by hands and head. The terror that gripped her tore her heart, her lungs. It was only by a supreme effort of will that she con-

trolled the spasm of her voice that demanded that she scream. She wrapped her arms tight about her waist, as if striving to hold herself together. She must not scream, she must not call, and she must not faint.

As she stared into the depth of shadow, her eyes began to focus more clearly what lay there. There was a dark splotch on the gravel where she knelt. She touched it—it was wet. The man was dead; such stricken, moveless relaxation and silence could only mean that. And if dead? Sudden strength came to her. She must see, she must know. She threw herself forward on her hands, peering down at the white blotch that was a face. She was not a foot away. A gleam of light from the windows crept between the leaves, outlining the features dimly.

It was *Conrad Fontaine*. And he was shot through the temple. She was too late—too late to warn him—too late to save Roland! It had been such an obvious place to appoint for a rendezvous, if Roland had been able to lure Conrad out of the club. But where now was Roland? She must find him. She would offer him an alibi. She would perjure her very soul for him. If necessary, she would claim that she had done it herself. Perhaps if she had the weapon— She forced herself to search the body, under it, around it—there was no weapon, or if there was, it had been flung so far away that it was useless for her to hope to find it in the darkness.

She staggered to her feet, sick, nauseated. Her head swam, and her knees doubled under her, but she must go on—she must; she must get back to the city, to his hotel—no! She might lead the trail to him. No; home, home. From there she would reach out to find him, clear him, lie for him—die for him.

Dodging from tree to tree, more for the occasional support they offered than

for concealment, she made her way toward the entrance. Occasionally an automobile roared by. Once the flash of the headlights swept her as a car took the bridge curve, and her heart stopped beating. She gained the creeper-covered wall that bounded the estate and followed it to the shelter of the towering gateposts. Another moment and she must face the full glare of the arc lights. No motor pulse sounded, nor did she hear voices. She strove to move naturally and quickly, as she stepped around the buttress and out on the gravel. A few rapid steps and she was outside on the main road, for the moment deserted—no, not deserted. Across the road stood a low, gray roadster. She paused in panic. Which way should she turn? She was too frightened to orient herself, to remember in which direction lay the inn. And then a quick exclamation almost at her side sent her reeling backward with a stifled gasp.

"Linda! Linda—what are you doing here!"

She looked up, and then, tottering with relief, cast herself into the arms stretched out toward her.

"Buddy—Buddy Caldwell! Take me away—get me away from here," she whispered hoarsely. Panic, withstood so long, came upon her with the sense of protection his presence offered her.

He caught her. "This way—my car." He led her across the road and helped her into the seat beside the driver's. "Get in; sit still. When you can, tell me."

She could not speak. Her eyes stared at him, eyes of the damned, terrified at the hell revealed to them. He climbed in beside her, released the brakes, and a moment later the car glided forward and down the steep grade, soundlessly as a ghost. He thought to relieve her tension by telling of the reason for his own presence.

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I couldn't locate him. I suddenly remembered that he used to belong to the Thursday Bridge, and I found out that Con was expected there to-night. I thought I'd come up and hang around. But Roland hasn't been at the club. I asked, and I don't think he came up here. I guess we're safe for this evening." He tried to speak lightly, with an ease he was far from feeling.

The woman beside him turned terrible eyes to his. She shuddered.

"Con—is in there—under the bushes—dead. I—I—killed him!"

Caldwell's hand swerved on the wheel, almost ditching the car.

"My God!" he whispered, "my God!" Instinctively he stepped on the accelerator, and the car shot ahead as if already pursued. As it roared down the road he curbed his runaway emotions, steadied himself. He could not but believe that Conrad Fontaine was lying in the club grounds, dead, but in his heart he knew that it was never Linda's hand that had been raised against him. And if not Linda—then Roland, of course, and she would try to shield him. He slowed the car down and turned to her calmly, keeping his voice to a natural cadence, as if speaking of the most commonplace matters imaginable.

"Has any one else found him? Do they know—up there?" She shook her head, her white lips set. "Good!" he exclaimed. "And does any one know that you've been here?" She shook her head once more. "Excellent." He managed to smile at her reassuringly, as if murder was no more momentous a matter than a game of hockey. "Of course, you knew about the bridge club, so that was the reason you came out here—just as I did. Fortunately I was there waiting—odd, wasn't it? Just as if it were by appointment, when really I was sleuthing Roland. Perfectly natural, when you come to think of it, though," he talked on, watching her

stony face from the corner of his eye. It did not relax. She was like a lay figure; a manikin, a life-size marionette with a face of wax. But he must know more if he was to help her, to save her.

Already they were well within the city limits and rapidly nearing the Drive along the river.

"Tell me all about it," he said, after a long silence. "Don't be afraid. I'm your friend all the way, you know. What is best to do? What shall our story be? Come on, Linda, confide the whole thing, and perhaps I'll see better than you can."

"I wonder where Roland is now?" was her answer. She was not concerned in any way for herself. That one sentence spoke volumes.

"If I take you home, Linda," he asked, "do you think you can act naturally? I couldn't take you in like this; you look like a ghost."

She seemed to wake from her trance. One hand still clutched her gold bag, with its shower of precious ornaments.

"I have rouge and powder," she said obediently and with a sudden accession of self-control. "I can make up so it won't be noticed. Pull up under a lamp, will you?" He did so, marveling at the strangeness of woman. Her hand was steady now as, with the aid of a tiny vanity mirror, she rouged her ashen cheeks to simulated freshness. "Yes," she said. "If you will promise not to stop till you find Roland and let me know—I'll go home. I'll be in my room; I'll not leave it. They may not find him—Con—for hours; not till morning, perhaps. I must talk to Roland. I must find out—" She checked herself suddenly.

"Look here," he said sharply, "I know you didn't kill Con, so don't tell me you did. But Roland was capable of anything in his frame of mind. Now, I'm for saving Roland because, more than anything else, he's your husband

and you love him and I want *you* to be happy. Now that you understand my motive, you know that I'll go to any length to make good. We can do better if we work together. You don't *know* that Roland did it, *do you?*"

"No," she admitted.

"Then let's assume he didn't. Well, then, where would he be now?"

"When he left me," she temporized, "he went to the Bellmore. I know; I followed him."

"Then I'll start there, after I leave you. You don't think he'd give himself up in any quixotic moment of contrition, do you?"

"I tell you—I did it!" she cried desperately.

"All right, then. We have to prove that he wasn't there to help you. And—another thing. If I go on after Roland, if I find him and bring him to you, will you give me your word of honor that if any question arises, no matter how, you won't state that you did it? Promise me that, or I won't move a finger for Roland."

"I promise," she agreed. "I'll say nothing—I'll know nothing, until I've seen him, or," she amended, "until I know where he is, I promise."

"I can trust you, I know," he said simply. "And now the sooner I get you back the better. We have been out for a little spin on Long Island, if anybody should ask you—to Westbury and back. Who's to prove we weren't? I happened to see you just as you were making for—let's see—Ishtar Lane's house."

"Yes," she said absently.

They were purring down the shining surface of Park Avenue, blue black in the shine of the electric.

"We're getting near home," he said gravely. "Pull yourself together now. Keep a grip on yourself, don't let go a minute, not even when you are alone in your own room. Don't give way. We're not out of the woods, but we

don't know yet whether we're *in* them. Hold tight, now—ready?"

"Yes," she answered calmly, and Caldwell marveled at the lightness of her tone.

He whirled across the pavement and brought up before the entrance of the apartment house. Jumping from his seat behind the wheel, he was ahead of the obsequious attendant to assist Linda to alight. Thanking her for the honor of her company, with gay volubility, he saw her to the cage of the elevator. She waved him a smiling "good night" as she saw his tall form foreshorten below her as the car sped upward. She asked some trivial question of the operator and let herself in at her own door.

It was as if Caldwell had hypnotized her by his orders, so strictly did she obey them. Not for one moment did she relax. She rang for her maid, smiled at the anxious inquiry of her eyes, and answered her unvoiced question.

"Yes, he's gone to a hotel—no, he doesn't know that I know, but it will be all right. I shall telephone to him in the morning."

She undressed, prepared for bed quietly, and dismissed the girl with grateful thanks. The lights were extinguished for a moment. She lay still. When she was sure that she would not be again disturbed, she got up, lighted the reading lamp at the head of her bed, threw a *matinée* over her nightgown, and set herself to wait. Some time during the night, surely, Caldwell would telephone to her. It was not yet midnight—not yet midnight!—and so much had happened. Here she sat nursing her terrible knowledge, and doubtless, in her fairylike boudoir, Teddy was sitting, puzzling over the day's happenings, unaware of the tragic news that awaited her, never dreaming that the angry words Con had flung at her for the first time in his life were

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the last words of his that she would ever hear.

An almost ungovernable impulse to telephone her and break the truth arose in Linda. She felt almost as if she had no right to withhold the facts, that, somehow, in so doing, she was guilty of treacherous deceit. Then she forgot that angle of the horror in her imaginings of Roland. Just how had it happened? Where had he fled? What were his thoughts of her, his wife—the cause of it all? Then, with a sudden wave of sickness, she recalled the feel of the dead body under her questing fingers—the choking terror that had gripped her heart as she gazed under the matted leafage and realized what lay there. A thousand mental photographs unreeled themselves before her—the starlight on the still waters of the inlet—the outline of the rustic bridge—the gleaming reflection of the light from the clubhouse windows on the whispering foliage of the concealing bushes. She felt again the shuddering blood creep at the roots of her hair as she had realized the meaning of that pale spot of moveless white flesh in the dark—all the details of her flight across the lawn, with its menacing shadows, its trees, its formless clumps of shrubbery, that to her distorted vision seemed every one to conceal a corpse. Her nerves were tense as violin strings, her eyes burned in her head, that ached and throbbed with every slow pulse of her heart.

Suddenly she sat erect, listening. Could it be? Her breath would not come; she was stifling. There was no mistake—his footstep, and now the door of the adjoining room—his room—opened and closed softly. There was a pause. She felt that he faced her door, that he was looking through it at her. She wanted to go to him, to take him in her arms, to murmur words of undying, forgiving love. She wanted to call out to him. She could not move

—could not articulate; but she felt him there, on the other side of that door. He had come back, thank God!—he had come back!

A tap sounded on the separating panels, so light that had she not been awake and listening with all her might she would not have heard. It came again, and his voice, very low, scarcely a whisper:

"Linda—Linda—are you there?"

In a moment she was afoot, her trembling hand had found the knob and thrown wide the door, then her arms flung out toward him. In the same breath and movement he was across the sill, his arms were about her. In a silent, mad embrace they stood, everything blotted out in the meeting of their two hearts—in desperation, stripped of everything save the utter need of one another, they clung together as if they two stood alone on the deck of a sinking ship, as if at any moment the black waves of death and separation might engulf them. And something that each had lacked before was fused forever into the very metal of their souls. When, after an eternity of communion, white, haggard face looked into white, haggard face and desperate eyes sought desperate eyes, it was with no doubt or question of love, only the doubt and question of a menaced future. He was the first to find his voice as he strained her to him.

"My darling, there is a way out. It is all my fault, anyhow. I drove you to do it. I am to blame. And I love you, my darling, my darling—nothing shall take you from me!"

She lifted her hands and took his face between them. She looked into his eyes with eyes that shone with an immortal passion of tenderness.

"It doesn't matter—*what* you did—or why—you are mine, and it was my fault. I hurt you so that you went mad. I couldn't make you see that you were wrong, and that I did and do love you

—and anything, anything, I don't care *what*—that has brought us together, I'm glad of, yes, glad!"

He crushed her to him once more, and then, with an effort of will, held her away.

"But we've got to plan. What does Caldwell know? Just what did you tell him? I saw your meeting at the gate. I knew he was waiting for something or somebody else, not for you. He was as amazed to see you as you were to see him. It isn't that I don't trust him. I know now that he is a friend. But what did you tell him?"

"I told him first about Con," she shivered, and he took her to his arms again with a movement of savage, protective pity. "I told him first I did it, but he wouldn't believe it."

"Thank God!" he exclaimed.

"I begged him to find you—to get you to come to me. I had to see you. He's gone to look for you now. Did he send you?"

Roland looked puzzled.

"No—I followed you and Caldwell back to the city. After I had gone into the club grounds, and found—what you'd left—I *had* to learn what it was that made you the wreck I saw at the gate. It took me some time. It wasn't till I thought of what would be the most natural place on the grounds for you to ask him to meet you, and then—"

She looked at him, speechless with amazement. He misinterpreted her look.

"You see, I spotted you when you followed me into the hotel. I bribed the starter to tell you I'd taken a cab and left. I wanted to see what you meant to do. I was in his storm booth when you were questioning him. And then, after you had been in the telephone booth, I found out the number you called. It came over me—I guessed. I remembered your threat, and I got the biggest car I could hire

at the garage around the corner. I wasn't ten minutes behind you, but I'd lost you; now do you see?"

But she was only partly following his words. All her senses were concentrated on one thing—the meaning she divined underlay everything. She caught him to her with frenzied joy.

"Do you mean," she choked with excitement, "that you didn't kill Con?—that you think I did?"

It was his turn to grow tense with a shiver of exaltation.

"Yes!" he exclaimed. "Do you—do you mean that *you* didn't? I—I didn't see him to-night—till I saw him dead!"

"Oh, oh!" She burst into a paroxysm of tears and she buried her head on his shoulder. "Of course, I thought you had. That's why I told Buddy I did it. I was on my way there to try and bribe a servant to take a message to Con, to warn him to keep out of your way. I—I thought I knew you were after him—your automatic—you packed it. I saw you take it out of the bag on the sly at the hotel. You'd said you would if you were ever sure. Oh, Roland! I'm—I'm so happy!"

He kissed her tear-wet eyes. His heart was bounding with happiness. Who or what was the Nemesis that had settled life's account with his former friend and companion, so selfish is love, he did not even question. There was but one radiant fact in the world. Between himself and Linda there could never come again a shadow of question or doubt—never again. In that miracle of bliss everything else was swallowed up. They sat side by side in an embrace of heart and soul, the world forgotten.

CHAPTER VIII.

The telephone shrilled and jangled, shattering their dream. Their tense nerves jerked in response, leaving them powerless for an instant. The bell

shrilled again insistently. Linda had a moment of terror—then she smiled.

"Caldwell," she guessed, taking up the instrument, "to report that he can't get in touch with you. What shall I tell him?"

"Tell him I'm here, and it's all right—here, give me that." He took the receiver from her. "What? Who?" A puzzled frown crossed his brow. "Here, Linda, for you—very particular—some sort of foreigner. Perhaps"—his words trailed off, but his look continued the sentence—"perhaps the body has been found—perhaps some one saw you.

"Steady," he whispered. "If it's anything you don't want to answer, pretend you can't hear."

But Linda's face had gone blank with surprise as she listened.

"Is she *there*?" she exclaimed. "At home! Very low, you say! She wants me—of course—I'll come—we'll come at once. Tell her—at once." She hung up. "Roland, it's Istharr. She's at home—dying. But how did she get there? I—I don't understand!" Rapidly she explained her mad visit to the sanitarium. In shocked bewilderment he heard of his friend's condition. Then a look of realization crept into his eyes. That tragic revelation explained so much that had always been puzzling about her strange personality.

"Good God!" he exclaimed. "Good God! And I never guessed, I never guessed! Dying! Poor woman—poor Istharr!"

Linda began to wind her heavy braids about her head, jamming in hairpins at random. She shook herself from the pegnoid, tossed her clothes on the bed. It was nearly two o'clock in the morning. Istharr must be ill, indeed, to have asked Tascha to call her at that hour—or was it some vagary of the drug? And why was she at home, and not in the sanitarium under the doctor's care? But there was no time to lose. These

were questions that would answer themselves in the course of time. Now it was imperative to answer Istharr's call. Dying! A vivid recollection of her as she had last seen her on the narrow cot, her pillows no whiter than her bloodless face, her eyes opaque with the frightening opaqueness of the eyes of a snake about to shed its skin. She heard in memory that toneless voice giving her vague instructions and vague warnings—sending a message to Roland, to call himself a fool, and raising weak hands to heaven to proclaim that she, of all the world, was the greatest fool—Poor Istharr!

"Call a cab!" she exclaimed, as she hooked and buttoned with nervous haste.

Before the old, brownstone front of Istharr's home they drew up at last. The front windows of the second floor were brightly lighted. The door was opened by the dour elderly woman, whose face fell as she recognized the visitors. Evidently she had been expecting the doctor.

"Miss Lane can't see you, ma'am," she said curtly. "She has retired; she is not well."

"I know," said Linda quickly. "Send for her maid, for Tascha, we must see her—we *must*!"

The woman shook her head hopelessly, glanced up the bleak stairs, and hesitated. Then she turned and slowly climbed to the floor above.

A moment later the black silhouette of Istharr's attendant stood beckoning at the head of the steep flight. The gas globe behind her made of her a shadowy, faceless bulk. Anxiously Linda tried to read her expression, but all she saw was a pale oval above the somber figure. As they neared, the woman turned and preceded them, walking silently as a ghost. Very cautiously she opened the door, very gently she spoke.

"They have come, Miss Istharr."

Both Linda and Roland were startled at the strength and clearness of the voice that called them.

"Come in, my dears, come on in. So you got my message? Nobody in your apartment seemed to know exactly where either of you were."

They entered the room, where every light was blazing full. Flowers were everywhere—in vases and bowls, lying on the coverlet, heaped on the tiny rococo night table. Isthara was propped up in bed by many pillows, beside her extended hand lay the battered cigarette case.

Linda exclaimed, the change was so great from the helpless, opaque-eyed woman she had last seen. Isthara looked as of old. Her movements were tense and alive, her eyes were bright. She was smiling her quizzical, twisted smile.

"It is good to see you," she went on, a queer note in her voice—a tumbling of words hurrying one upon the other. "I ran away from the sanitarium. I suppose you know, Linda; you must have telephoned."

"No," said Linda. "I never dreamed you were back. I thought you promised the doctor——"

Isthara nodded gayly as she lit another cigarette.

"Yes, my dear, I know. But I wanted to make a good exit. No curtain calls, you see. And I am bent on not having an anticlimax. Come here, Roland."

Roland crossed to her, sat down on the bed, and took her hand in his; his eyes, pitying and affectionate, never left her face.

"What I want to know is—is all right between you two?" She turned her eager eyes on the young people beside her.

Linda looked at Roland, her heart in her eyes. Her husband leaned across the bed, and with his free hand sought hers.

"I begin to understand," he said slowly.

"Had to do some little act of kindness before I left," Isthara hurried on.

"I couldn't leave you money; what I've got goes to that angel of a woman who has cared for a peevish, impossible person like me for years, because she loved me." She looked across the room to where Tascha crouched on the chaise longue in an attitude of despair. "You've got more now than is good for you, anyway, Roland. What had I to will you, my children? Not a thing. But I *could* give you to each other. It all came to me, Linda, as you talked to me in the hospital. I couldn't answer you, I couldn't make you see that I understood. But I *did* hear, and I understood, far more than you did, what and who the trouble was, and I knew, too, that unless that canker was cut out altogether it would come back. So—I cut it out for you. That's what I'm leaving you in my unwritten will—your future together, your love for each other. I killed him—Fontaine."

Isthara sank back, a satisfied smile on her face, and relaxed with the calmness of the well content.

"Oh, no, no, no!" cried Linda. "Don't, *don't* say such things, Isthara! They were right; you are mad."

Isthara looked up at the man bending over her, with the impish grin of a gamin.

"You don't think so, do you, Roland? Anyway, if they haven't found him yet, they will—at the turn of the drive, just beyond the first culvert under the lilac hedge. I telephoned for him to come out and meet me there. He didn't dare refuse; he didn't know what I had to say, and besides, he had no reason to guess that I——" Suddenly she had turned a ghastly white. Her fictitious strength was ebbing fast.

"Oh, everything has worked out all right—just as I'd planned," she went on with an effort. "First, I had to reach Roland, dear Roland. I've been Roland's confidante for years and years,

Linda. I knew all about his business, about everything that concerns him. Why, he's been blood for that leech, Conrad Fontaine, since their college days. He's supported him, put money into his schemes, helped him, plunged like a crazy man, and carried many a mad thing through, too, for him. But Conrad—he'd pander to any of Roland's vices in order to hold him. Oh, don't I know, haven't I tried my hardest to make you see, you poor, blind idiot?" The affection in her voice belied her words as she tried to squeeze Roland's hand with her weakening grasp.

"You did. You were always right."

"Don't you see," she said earnestly, "when Roland married you he began cleaning up his investments. He didn't want to be loaded up with wild gambles any more. He'd promised Con he'd back him in a big scheme. Instead, he backed right out. The only way that Conrad could hope to get his backer back"—she paused as if expecting applause for her play on words—"was to do what he did—try to break it up between you. Didn't he know Roland, here, almost as well as I do? Didn't I warn you"—she looked at Linda—"that Rowly was sensitive? Why, he saw red the moment he got that letter of yours. Oh, I could see it all, when you told me. I could see Conrad's mind working, see the thoughts he had thought, the plans he had made. I knew what he'd done, and—but all the rest came afterward. I didn't know just how I was going to circumvent him—not then—but afterward it all came to me, and it worked out, step for step, as easily as a stocking unravels once it's started. It wasn't any trick at all, and," she sighed happily, "I'm so glad—it was worth the effort! To bring you together again—my dears."

She lay back and her words came in a dreamy whisper. "I kept on thinking about you two and your love for

each other—that Conrad was trying to destroy. It spurred me on—gave me strength. I don't even remember hearing the pistol shot. I was blind—and my heart was beating in my eyes. I don't know how long I was there, but when I got up to go, I found I'd been on my knees beside him— My—my gown, Tascha—tell them, wasn't it torn and wet and muddy?"

"Yes, *mademoiselle*," the heartbroken woman answered.

There was a long silence in the room. Istharr's eyes, resting on the bowed heads of Roland and Linda, glowed with infinite love.

"Go, my children. I—I want you to remember only how glad I am that you are happy again. Promise that you will not grieve for me. Go now," she pleaded. "Good-by!"

Roland rose and stood beside her. Reverently and with infinite sadness he raised the white, wasted hand to his lips.

"Good-by, my dearest friend, good-by."

Linda knelt down. Her fingers passed lightly over Istharr's damp forehead.

"Somehow it will be made right for you, Istharr," she said brokenly. "We'll never forget what you've done for us."

Roland led her from the room and down the grim, half-lit stairs.

CHAPTER IX.

Dawn was breaking. Faintly in the east the blue of night was paling, though the stars burned bright overhead. A chill wind crept down the deserted street. Linda and Roland stood hand in hand before the old house, looking up at the lighted windows of the second floor.

"Pray, Roland, pray," she whispered chokingly. "I can't bear it. And yet she's happy—I saw it in her eyes. She's happy; she has no regrets, not one!"

"God help her!" he prayed devoutly. "God be merciful! It's an awful tangle, Linda. It's a fearful thing to take a man's life. But if there's forgiveness for any of us wretched mortals, surely it won't go hard with her. Come," he said gently.

They turned away, walking the dead streets in silence. Even the avenues were deserted. It was a strange hour to be abroad. Now and then a policeman eyed them questioningly. There were no cabs, and the tears that still coursed down Linda's cheeks made her unwilling to board a lighted train, so they walked on, clinging to each other as the light drifted up into the sky, catching whiffs of vagrant cloud and painting them a misty rose.

As they neared their home Linda dried her eyes. After all, it was a new day—a day of beginnings. The night of unhappiness was past, gone with the two souls that had left the world, gone, leaving them with a new heaven and a new earth. Linda lowered her eyes from the contemplation of the rippled pink and azure above the tall buildings, so remote and so mystically beautiful, and became aware that across the street stood a long, gray roadster that she recognized.

"Look!" she exclaimed. "Buddy's car. He's sitting in it, watching our place. Come."

She darted across the street. Caldwell sat hunched behind the wheel. He looked up at them as they approached, and Linda called his name. His eyes were heavy and he looked stiff and cold, but he smiled.

"I got here just a while ago," he explained. "I was so done up, I just lay here, fagged out for half a moment. They told me you were out, over there." He nodded toward the apartment house. "I suppose they thought me quite mad, calling at half-past three in the morning. But I have news—Isthar—"

Linda interrupted him. "We have

just left her. She is dying— She sent for us to come."

"Then you know." Caldwell was silent a moment. "Ghastly business, but—but—"

"'But'—that's just it," said Roland. "Come in and have some hot coffee."

"All right," said Caldwell. "Get in and I'll take you across the street."

Cummings, paler and more weary-eyed than usual, was still up and waiting.

"You see," said Caldwell, as he sipped the steaming beverage, "a friend of mine—a reporter—got it at headquarters when it came—"

"When what came?" said Roland, puzzled.

"Isthar's confession," Buddy explained. "Oh, she left nothing to chance. She made it in full, while she was waiting for you, I guess—witnessed by the two women, her servants. She sent it to police headquarters, and they telephoned out to the club. Con wasn't found till then. Isthar may have been insane—but—she died game!"

There was a long silence. In their hearts they did reverence to the soul of a sinner.

Caldwell rose at last.

"I came to tell you at once—didn't know that you knew—and I wanted to clear things for you. Now I'll be off to sleep; I need it—and you, too." He looked at Roland and then turned his tired eyes to Linda's white face. "You, too. Don't you ever get on the outs with each other again—it's too painful and it's too—dangerous. And look what it does to me!"

Roland took him by the hand.

"Man to man, Buddy—thanks, old friend."

Linda laid her soft palm above the two clasped ones.

"The best and kindest friend a woman ever had, Buddy—and—she said so, too. Good night—no, good morning, and God bless you."

CHAPTER X.

Christmas Eve. The soft snow falling on the city streets, gala with the regalia of red and green, busy with the hurrying throngs. Linda looked down at the crowds below her window, at the regular lines of crawling motors, then up at the gray sky and its swirling down of crystals, eddying past. She turned at the sound of footsteps and greeted Roland as he entered the room.

"Christmas Eve," she said slowly. "Do you remember? A year since I met you."

He crossed to her side, drew her head to his shoulder, and kissed the thick, black braids.

"It isn't in my heart to celebrate," he said, after a moment's silence. "I couldn't. There has been too much sadness and too much sorrow in this year—but—I'd like to go somewhere to-night to hear midnight mass. I'd like to somehow—be grateful and still—I've forgiven Con—and Isthair, poor Isthair!"

She took his hand in hers.

"It's just what I wanted to do, Roland, go to midnight mass. I want to feel that I'm forgiven for being what I was, for doing what I did. I don't deserve to have you as I have you now. I don't deserve to be happy like this.

But I'm another woman now, thank God! There's only one thing left to wish for—that Teddy will get over her bitterness. But there must be some way to comfort her—to reach her."

"Time," said Roland softly, "only time. Poor Teddy! To-morrow, a year ago, and she was a bride—and now——"

"I haven't heard of her for months, not since—she went away. Nobody has, not even her own people. Sister wrote me from home."

Cummings, at the door, coughed discreetly.

"From the cable office, madam, for you."

"For me?" exclaimed Linda. "A cable; open it, Rowly, while I sign the receipt." She heard his quick intake of breath as she handed back the slip to the valet and turned expectantly toward her husband.

He handed her the message. "There's the answer to your prayer, Linda," he said softly.

Linda glanced at the crinkled paper, her wonderful eyes glowed, a smile as lovely as light itself made her radiant. She read aloud in a hushed voice:

"Theodora Beaudine Fontaine, born in Paris this morning. Peace on earth, good will to men.
TEDDY."





His Christmas Angel

By Winston Bouve

Author of "Dollars,"
"The Romantic Lady," etc.

SHE isn't wearing black!" exclaimed the elder Mrs. Gage, adjusting her lorgnette. The comment was unnecessary, as the gold-colored gown of the young woman in question was striking enough to be picked out instantly among all the varicolored gowns in the assembly.

"She couldn't wear that shade unless she touched up her hair," decided Mrs. Gage's daughter-in-law, who, after a very mild fashion, was inclined to blondness herself. "I never heard of a blonde trying to wear yellow."

"But to be out of mourning in scarcely a year, and to be brazen enough about the whole disgraceful thing to come back here—oh, Gilbert, you've met Mrs. Claggett Gage, haven't you?"

Gilbert Duncan came toward them, thus beckoned, with a wan look of resignation. He didn't like dinner dances; he didn't like old Mrs. Gage, but he bowed heroically, and even lingered beside her. It was, of course, his duty, as brother-in-law of the hostess.

"Why," she inquired flatly, "did Grace ask Kate Merlin here to-night? It's letting us all in for a good deal, it seems to me!"

The middle-aged lawyer gestured with the bland grace of an eighteenth-century courtier. He remembered that

Mrs. Merlin had given him the next dance.

"Perhaps she wanted her to come. You might ask Grace," he suggested as a wicked afterthought. With an excuse he left them, wondering how many more times he was to hear the same thing, more or less flatly put.

Lord, but women were vicious! They turned on each other like rats, who always attack their weak or injured kind. But Kate, poor girl, must have been long since hardened to such attacks. As he made his way through the charming drawing-rooms to where she stood, he tried to remember just when she had bolted with Jock Merlin. Eleven—twelve years ago. And after the bolt, it had only been two years until her husband, Cyrus Tilton of the Mills, had died. That was the first considerate and decent thing the old reprobate had ever done, Gilbert mused, for he hadn't divorced her, so that she could marry charming Merlin, and he had made her life a weary and shameful-enough burden ever since he had married her, a girl of nineteen. Now she was widowed again, more defenseless than ever, and home again, if she cared to call Felix Manor and the big Tilton house home.

He claimed her from the boy she was enslaving. It happened to be his

nephew Christopher, home from college for the holidays.

"Susan's in the other room," he suggested somewhat pointedly.

Susan was the radiant young person to whom all Felix Manor considered Christopher engaged. The music started up, and Duncan guided Mrs. Merlin toward the ballroom. But she paused on the threshold. Behind them, in the square hall, cushioned niches on either side of the fireplace invited a cozy chat.

"Why dance? We aren't of the fox-trotting era, Gilbert. Talk to me instead." She settled herself among the cushions, leaned forward, her lovely hands clasped about her knee.

"And tell me why you deported Chris posthaste. I'm innocuous enough now." She laughed. Her laughter was a charming asset, but it no longer crept up into her eyes. They used to crinkle tenderly at the corners whenever she smiled, like Du Maurier's dream duchess, he remembered inconsequently.

"You'll be perilous at seventy, Kate."

His blue-gray eyes swept her approvingly. Her hair had not been quite so golden, twelve years ago, but her fair skin, her small features, her tricky eyes—these, you discovered, were brown as a doe's, by some happy accident—were as flawless as ever. She was in her late thirties, he knew. No other contemporary of hers, in Felix Manor, at least, boasted Kate's slenderness or her looks.

Perhaps that was why they were so wont to boast, more or less blatantly, of other things—impeccable husbands, homes as secure as their stone foundations, children at smart schools, friends of their own kind.

He watched her furl her great black fan, wondered if she wanted such things. There was something like hunger that gleamed avidly now and then from behind the enamel of her poise. Hunger for what? He wasn't sure.

"Who is Susan?" she asked, watching the dancers through the doorway.

"Susan Murray? She's dancing with Chris now. Mr. Murray's daughter. She lives in the big stone house on Blue Hill. She's absurdly young, of course, and Chris has another year at college, but Mr. Murray has promised Chris a berth. We're all very well pleased."

"She's charming," decided Mrs. Merlin, smiling faintly, her eyes following the girl's retreating apricot skirts. She appreciated the yellowish bloom Susan Murray wore in her blue-black hair. That and her eager mouth gave her a gypsy look that distinguished her from the rest.

"Christopher seems to think so." Christopher's uncle turned his whole attention to the woman beside him. "Have you come back for good, Kate?" She shrugged.

"How do I know? I've opened up my house, engaged a cook and two maids, but—" Her lips curved deliciously. "I doubt if I can stand the cold, after all."

Gilbert knew she was not referring to her tropical winters or to New York sleet.

"Grace's hearth is always warm."

As he spoke, his ample sister-in-law came toward them with a man in tow. It made him realize that during all the time he and Kate had been sitting there no one had approached or done more than distantly bow to her. Grace, big, kindly, widowed Grace, had had all she could do to relaunch her old school friend into the frosty company of all the people who had once known her. The man she was bringing up now, Gilbert guessed, had asked to be presented. He knew Grace did not like sleek Claggett Gage. A flicker of amusement twitched his graying mustache. Old Mrs. Gage and Claggett's insipid wife had been more definitely rude to Kate than any one else. He minded handing

her over to Gage far less when he thought of that.

Gage claimed acquaintance with her in rather intimate fashion. He vowed he had kissed her when she was fifteen and wore her hair in a yellow braid down her back.

Kate, stroking the plumes of her fan, caught his mother's bitter gaze from across the room, narrowed her fetching eyes.

"That makes us old sweethearts, then. How nice to find part of my past intact! Most of it——"

Her gay eyes mocked the crowded room, and Duncan, with a sickish feeling, watched her move off on Gage's arm. The little fool! Didn't she know that her only salvation lay in propitiating wives and mothers, not in appropriating sons and husbands?

Mrs. Thomas Duncan's dinner dance was rather an important affair, and people kept drifting in. The younger set of Felix Manor, like the younger set of most Westchester colonies, was a lively and rather large contingent. Especially so during holiday time, when college boys brought home a friend or two for Christmas and all the subdebs left finishing school for the fortnight's festivities. Grace Duncan had the happy faculty of sharing her friends with Christopher and holding open house for him as well. To-night her splendid home was so full of smart, slangy young people and clever, correct older ones that it was actually hard to keep track of one's dinner partner.

After Kate Merlin sauntered off with Gage, Gilbert did not see her again until half the guests had gone. And then he discovered her in the shadows under the stairs. Christopher knelt before her, fastening the buckles of her fur-topped carriage shoes.

"Because I was lonely, because it was Christmas, perhaps because this is—was—home," she was saying, half un-

der her breath, to the worshipful boy at her feet.

Gilbert knew that he was intruding upon one of those exceedingly private moments that are often to be had in a very public spot. But he suddenly found himself more Christopher's uncle than Kate's long-discarded lover. While he waited, one foot on the stairs, for a portly matron to come out of the improvised cloakroom, he listened.

"I wonder if you remember a Christmas—oh, ever so long ago," the boy's voice inquired huskily. "I was just a kid, having a tree, and all that. There was a party, I think—you came, and wore a gold-colored dress like this, but gauzy." From the rustling sound he must have touched her gown.

"I remember that Christmas!"

Kate's voice, always a thrilling voice, held a note of well-remembered joy. The man on the stairs remembered that Christmas, too. It was just after she had met Jock Merlin, at Grace's home. She had already begun to blossom under his spell.

"So do I! Mother always trimmed the tree herself—you helped her that year. And instead of the Santa Claus on top there was a wax angel——"

"I dressed it myself in gilt gauze, and made the wings. Scraps from my gown!" remembered Kate, still in that lilting voice.

"And afterward I stole it and hid it. You see, you were my first love. I called you my Christmas angel!" he confessed.

"You dear!"

Gilbert wondered if she had touched him. Heaven knew her voice was careless enough!

Christopher's uncle forgot his dowager upstairs. When Kate involved herself in a moment's sentiment she was wholly unreliable. He approached them firmly. He had his duty to Christopher to think of, so he lingered with them until, adieux completed, Kate

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shivered in her mink wrap as the butler held open the door.

And rather unexpectedly, in the moment they had alone together, he heard himself suggesting luncheon in town the next day. He reasoned afterward that a little kindness was due the poor girl; but, after the last guest had departed and he had gone up to the room Grace had long ago set aside as his whenever he chose to claim it—he had rather a dismal flat in the city, she thought—he wondered why the logical reason had not preceded the impulse.

It did not take Duncan long to discover that he was not the only man who was trying to even up Kate Merlin's score of cuts and unkindnesses. Claggett Gage and Christopher were seen with her as often as two men can be seen with one woman in a town where very little goes on unseen. Which is very often, indeed.

Gage, because he was an ease-loving soul who didn't like domestic disturbances, usually came to her Elm Street house. Not even Mrs. Duncan ever dropped in on them there; she was working night and day on some Christmas campaign that had to do with raising money for the families of striking mill hands. The Tilton mills, now owned by a distant cousin of Kate's first husband, had shut down. And Kate, porcelain fair in a black-and-gold mandarin coat, with the firelight gilding her hair, pleased his vision as much as her rare tea, her deeply cushioned chairs, and warm room, where one caught, now and then, a fragrance not unlike myrrh, pleased his palate and his indolent limbs. When he was with her he forgot the slump in his business, the new electric runabout Alice insisted she must have, the atrocious reports that came from Leslie's school every quarter. At least, he thought he forgot these things; Kate lent him a little of her own glamour, and in it he found himself, no longer

the baldish husband and father of an exasperating household, the pompous layman who bore the collection plate each Sunday at St. Mark's, but a figure of romance again. As a matter of fact, he regularly confided all of his domestic and business worries to her, and was comforted thereby. And by that time it was so late that he had to scuttle home in a roundabout way, as though he had just gotten off the six-eleven at the Manor station. It was all very innocent, you see. And Kate, watching him dodge through the December dusk of Elm Street, from her vantage point behind the curtains, always chuckled softly.

She never laughed at Christopher, who, his fair hair shining above the collar of his raccoon coat, drove up in his low-hung car at all hours, to take her wherever she would, whenever she permitted his escort. She laughed *with* him instead. Romped with him, too. Once, after a snow flurry, two scandalized old ladies who lived—and learned much—across the street, saw her pelting him with snowballs in her front yard; heard her shriek ecstatically as a wet handful of the mushy stuff landed on her cheek and trickled down her neck. She had come out bareheaded that day, too, with no more protection against the weather than an absurd pink wool sweater, such as girls wear all the time, over her sheer blouse and plaited skirt. The older lady, Miss Mehitable Greves, darkly suggested rheumatism to her sister.

It was this frivolousness of Kate's that outraged Gilbert. He couldn't feel sorry for her when she was conducting herself in a manner so utterly unbefitting her recent bereavement, her shadowy past and present. For a woman in her position it was undignified to the last degree, and she had no business involving Christopher in such folly. He privately censored his sister-in-law, as well, for encouraging the boy's atten-

tions to her old friend. He began checking off the days until Chris went back to Cambridge.

Three weeks, in his opinion, was entirely too long a vacation for any self-respecting university to give. And of that three weeks, Susan, who should have monopolized the major part of his time, had been spared, so far, an afternoon's skating and one extensive evening call. Oh, Christopher saw her every day, of course. One sees everybody every day in cliques such as Susan and he belonged to. That's part of having "a crowd." But he only *saw* her.

Gilbert himself, after office hours, which were erratic, as became an attorney whose private income exceeded his middle-aged ambitions, spent half his time in fuming at Kate and her follies, and the remainder in hoping she would not attach too much importance to a volume of new poems by a poet he remembered as a favorite of hers, or a box of candy, as the case might be. She had an ungodly passion for caramels, which she ate with impunity.

He was in the latter more amiable frame of mind when he stamped the crust of an early snowfall from his feet and rang her bell late one afternoon, just before Christmas.

Kate welcomed him from a hassock drawn close to the fire, where she sat manipulating yards of tinsel and gauze. He noticed the intimate tea table, its still steaming urn. She had evidently had a guest—a solitary guest—for the tea table, with its burden of eggshell china, stood immaculate, untouched, save for two cups and saucers that had been placed on the mantel. Those unused bits of porcelain struck him as being rather pathetic. Was she always ready for company that never came?

She nodded to a near-by chair, her arms full of the stuff he now took to be cheesecloth. She looked deliciously gay.

"Gilbert, they've taken me back into

the fold." She flicked a bit of tinsel in his face. "Grace managed it, of course—but Mrs. Gage phoned this morning to ask whether I'd help with the tree they're putting up in the old clubhouse for the kiddies across the tracks." "Across the tracks" meant the quarters of the mill hands, that stood in a ramshackle row beyond the railroad crossing, at the far end of town.

"They were in a last-minute rush, of course—it's the twenty-second, isn't it?—and they gave me the nastiest job of all." She grinned. "But I nearly wept, Gilbert. She was almost cordial."

In that plaintive gayety of hers Duncan found a new Kate.

"Be good and you'll be happy, even in Felix Manor, Kate."

"Be dull, you mean," she mourned. "I've got to get some sort of a kick—even out of Felix Manor!"

"Haven't you been getting kicks out of almost everything always?"

She laid down the stocking she was snipping into shape, sucked an injured thumb.

"I can't do without them now. Your legal mind should grasp the logic of that."

"My legal mind grasps no logic of any sort in connection with you," he retorted. "I repeat, Kate, you've had your fling. Let other women's property alone." His eye strayed to the cigarette ash on a taboret; a half-consumed stub bore the initials "C. G." "Let Claggett Gage alone. That mother of his is death-dealing here in the Manor."

"Don't be 'Christopher's uncle,'" she begged, poking at the fire. "You're not thinking altogether of Claggett Gage, are you?" The thought of Claggett brought a smile to her mouth.

"No," he admitted. "I'm thinking of Susan." Leaning forward, he touched her slight shoulder. "She is as eager for life as you were at nineteen, Kate. Don't cheat her out of it, turn her into

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"I haven't had love!"

The poker clattered to the hearth. Kate, no longer gentle and gay, sprang up.

"Would I have come back here if I had found peace or happiness anywhere else? Gilbert, for eight of the ten years I roamed with Jock I was a miserable, disillusioned creature. I haven't had love. That's the pitiful part of it all. Oh—he didn't ill-treat me. I think he was always fond of me. He always—came back to me." She smiled. A smile sadder than tears.

Duncan sat speechless. He felt as though the most beautiful legend in the world had been shattered. That Kate, beautiful, beloved Kate, should have been left desolate by the one man for whom she had given up everything! That the love that had been their shame and their glory should have fallen to dust so soon! It had meant a great deal to him, that legend. It had had a good deal to do with the loneliness of his life.

"But you loved him, Kate? You stuck it out."

"I loved him at first. I stuck it out because I had no alternative. Oh, if he'd wanted his freedom he could have had it, you understand? He didn't want it; he had what he wanted. And I—I had gotten what I had wanted, too."

She picked up a Tanagra statuette, examined it curiously. Her voice was very quiet now, a little bleak.

"For two years before he died he needed me. That helped. His heart gave out, and when those attacks came on, only I could nurse him back to something like health. It made him happier to have me there—to know that I held nothing against him."

She took up her sewing, stitched away at a sleazy stocking. "And I still can't

see why Susan is so much more important than I am," she sighed.

The moment of which he might have made a great deal was wholly lost. But he could not ask more of her. He could not even tell her all the sensible truths that tipped his tongue. And, perhaps because of her confidence, which he knew had been given to him alone, he felt very tenderly toward her before he left, when she went with him to the door.

"I'll not hurt Chris," she promised, suddenly sober again.

"No one but you could now, I'm afraid."

"I didn't know any one was that fond of me. It's pleasant, Gilbert, to be adored. I've never had quite that before."

"You could have had it." His harshness made her wince. "It's very pleasant, I imagine. But you're a fair person, Kate. What could you give the boy in return?"

He was fastening his overcoat; she ran her finger through each buttonhole—an old trick of hers.

"A peg to hang his dream on. Enough, Gilbert! But I won't. Honor bright. I'll play fair." She pushed him out into the vestibule. "Now go. You've got what you came for!"

He wasn't sure; but neither was he sure that that was all he wanted.

Kate worked, after her late and solitary dinner, until the last of the cheese-cloth had been transformed into tinsel-topped Christmas stockings. Mrs. Gage had wondered if they could be finished that day and brought over to the clubhouse the next morning, to be filled. Her last thought, before she went to sleep, was of a simple black dress she would wear on the morrow, of a subdued and suitable manner she would assume.

But though she was very much the recent widow, the next day, the greeting accorded her by the handful of

women already at work was as depressing as was the lifeless atmosphere of the long-unused club living room, where they were all gathered at impromptu tables. Even Grace Duncan, big and rosy in her seal dolman, saw the futility of trying to include her in their intimate, uninteresting chatter.

Why, thought Kate rather pitifully, as she filled her stockings with barley-sugar sweets and toys and mittens, couldn't these generous and philanthropic women give her a small share of their charity?

It was toward noon that Susan Murray sailed in, followed by her father's contribution of a barrel of great, red Baldwins from the famous Murray orchards, and was pressed into service. Mrs. Duncan made room for the girl at her table, pretended not to see her nonchalant discourtesy to Mrs. Merlin. She was almost too kind a woman to be clever or sharp about people; but she couldn't help seeing that affairs between Susan and her son were not *in statu quo*. From time to time she glanced uneasily at Kate. Was she hypnotizing Chris at thirty-seven as she had hypnotized Cyrus Tilton at nineteen, and young Merlin a few years later? Kate had no right to defraud time like that! They had been to school together, these two, with several other now middle-aged women. Which of them could still inspire a boy to amorous dreaming? It was the protective mother instinct that made her kind eyes hard as they scanned Kate's white-and-gold beauty. She shouldn't cheat Chris as she had cheated the years. He was Susan's, for youth belongs to youth! Then the last of her woman's, mother's bitterness flared down and died. Poor Kate. What had she but her beauty? Neither husband nor home nor child; few friends, she guessed.

And Christopher, thought Christopher's mother proudly, would never break faith with a girl who cared for

him; somehow, she must make Kate know that. Then no one would be hurt.

"Come home with me to lunch, Kate," she suggested at last, dusting her hands of glinting snow powder. "And you, too, Susan."

Kate hesitated. She had promised Gilbert—

"I promised to meet dad at two," lied Susan glibly. "I can just finish stringing this popcorn before I go."

Kate read resentment in the handsome young mouth. Susan wouldn't accept because *she* might. But she made excuses of her own, and when Mrs. Duncan had gone, found herself alone with the girl. She hadn't realized it was so late. The novelty of her task had made it light.

She forgot the half-trimmed tree in the corner, the gray day outside. She looked twelve years behind it, into the library of the then new Duncan home, gay with branch and mistletoe, bright with candlelight. The "tree of heaven," young Jock Merlin had laughingly called twelve-year-old Christopher's tree as he had climbed up to crown it with the wax angel she had dressed and winged in gilt gauze. His blue eyes had met hers meaningly. Heaven! She had thought so then, under a fateful sprig of mistletoe, where they discovered that they could not live without each other.

"This is done," Susan dispelled the vision coolly. "We might try festooning it around the tree now, to see how much more is needed. And then I'd better go."

But while Mrs. Merlin balanced herself on a squat ladder, decking the spruce with the flaky ropes, Susan, muff in hand, lingered.

"Heavens," thought Kate in dismay, "she's going to be horrid!"

It was quite likely. But Susan did not have the opportunity to utter a word, scathing or otherwise. For before she could speak, the outer door was

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flung back, and Christopher himself blew in on a gust of wind.

"They told me I'd find you here, Kate," he informed her joyously, and stopped short, seeing Susan. "Oh—hello, there." Kate, twisted about on her perch, barely refrained from a giggle at his discomfiture.

"Hello," said Susan. The boy didn't know whether to let her saunter off in this casual manner or not, though her presence embarrassed him. He wasn't up to handling the situation. But Susan herself solved his difficulties. As if she remembered something at the door, she turned, moved toward him. She had the sure grace of the girl who rides and swims and runs, Kate noted; she found herself weighing that grace of hers, her rugged, wild-flower beauty, sheathed in sport clothes that looked a little taggy to the older woman's eyes, against her own perfected good looks.

"Chris, are you taking me to the dance to-morrow night?"

She spoke of the Christmas Eve ball that was an annual event at the country clubhouse; this year it was a charity affair, for the benefit of the same mill strikers who were obtaining all of Felix Manor's sympathy. She seemed, somehow, to be asking more than the simple question. Her larkspur eyes rested very steadily on Christopher as she spoke.

"I'm taking Mrs. Merlin—you, too, if you'll come, Sue."

Kate understood that his answer was an ultimatum of some sort. How little she understood these children and their way of doing things. But she remembered what Gilbert expected of her, looked down at the girl very graciously.

"Only because I asked him to, Miss Murray. I take advantage of Chris because I've been away for a long time, and because I've very few friends left here, I find. Won't you come with us?"

Christopher looked up at her gratefully.

"How nice of you," drawled Susan. "But I dare say I can get up a party of my own, and"—this she flung over her tweed shoulder—"I'd not think of breaking up your—advantage!"

It was very young of Susan, and not at all subtle. But it isn't always the subtlest digs that gouge deepest. The girl was, of course, justified. One couldn't blame her for showing fight when her most valuable private property had been vandalized, even by a beauty with a pathetic, if predatory past. But Kate had been trying to do the decent thing, to avoid Christopher; she had meant to back out of the Christmas dance at the last moment, leaving the field to Susan; to play fair, in fact, as she had promised Gilbert. Now, as the door slammed, she sat down on the top step of the ladder and wept. It hadn't been a pleasant morning.

"Kate," the boy stammered, aghast at her tears. "Don't cry—dear!"

The ladder was not high; it was hardly a ladder at all, but a pair of kitchen steps. He reached up, swept cumped, beaten Kate into his arms.

"They've all been rotten to you, haven't they, dear heart?" His impetuous lips touched her too-gold hair, her wet cheek. "I love you, Kate. Let me marry you, and take you out of all this; take care of you always."

"No—no!" she sobbed against his comforting shoulder. It had been so long since she had been loved like this! "I'm not worth your dear love, Chris. They'll all tell you so!" Her tears trembled in a choked little laugh.

"You're an angel!" He laughed, too, tenderly, shyly. "And mine. You've been my Christmas angel for a long time, you know."

Why not? She could give him enough. Years ago Gilbert himself would have taken that much gladly. She fished in his pocket for a handkerchief, fearful of the ravaging tears.

"Not bright and new as she used to

be, Chris—a little out of curl, I'm afraid. But yours—if you want her!"

It was no longer an elated Kate who, in the rustling gold-colored gown that Christopher loved, came late to the Christmas ball, after she had helped distribute the charity tree's fruitage of gifts into eager little hands. Christopher had come for her early that evening.

"Mother wants you to come over to the kids' tree, and help with their party first," he had told her, after his lover's greeting. Which meant, of course, that Mrs. Duncan knew nothing of their engagement. Why, thought Kate, couldn't love ever come to her in open, happy fashion?

It was not easy to meet Grace Duncan's friendship with the particular sort of guile she had to use, to listen to his mother's talk of Christopher and everything that concerned him—which inevitably seemed to include Susan. Afterward, when the last sleepy, happy child had been sent home, the boy managed a word with her alone, in the shadow of the tree.

"I didn't tell her, sweetheart, for all sorts of reasons." He was fumbling with a tinsel ornament that had come loose from its branch, and frowning over it. "But she—everybody—must know before I go back to Cambridge."

So he, too, was dreading what his mother and uncle would say!

"Be very, very sure before you do tell them," she warned him. "I don't want ever to reproach myself for this, Chris."

It occurred to her that she was echoing another warning, a warning Jock had laughed away twelve years—twelve centuries—ago, under Grace Duncan's fateful mistletoe, as her son was laughing its repetition away to silly nothingness. It was almost ghostly; Jock—not the worn and dissipated man, but the boy who had died long years ago—

looked his love through Christopher's ardent eyes. For the moment they were alone in the all-but-deserted clubroom; only Mrs. Gage and Grace Duncan were left beside the lovers, and their voices drifted down from a dressing room upstairs. But Kate avoided the boy's impetuous arms.

"I forgot!" She laughed, too, with a faint undernote of bitterness. "One is always sure at twenty-two. Hush—they're coming down!"

She presented her polished shoulders for the wrap he carried.

"Don't be silly to-night, Chris. There's no need of making ourselves conspicuous so soon—you've a week left to 'fess up in."

"You darling!" He pressed her hand, grateful for the respite, and wondered at her smile.

After the first two dances at the country club Christopher did not have the opportunity to make her conspicuous or otherwise, for the Christmas punch inspired the most carefully kept and distributed husbands and sons to break dances with débutantes, to deposit dowagers in the shelter of convenient palms, and openly seek out Kate. It was Claggett Gage who succeeded in annexing himself more or less permanently to her, oblivious, under the exhilaration of the punch, of his wife's meaning gaze. He was rather amusing at first, and he danced well, but she tired of his attentions before long, and welcomed the appearance of Christopher as they were sitting out an encore on the steps.

"Let's sit out the next," he begged, when Gage had left them. She followed him down into the deserted lounge, seated herself—always with an eye to the effect—on the dark-velvet divan that threw her skin and hair and gown into such dazzling relief.

"You're as lovely as a dream to-night!" He lifted her hands, kissed each vein in her delicate wrists. For

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all his ardor there was a tenderness, a reverential quality to his passion, she thought, that stirred her to unexpected depths of feeling for him. As she had told Gilbert, it was pleasant to be adored! She wouldn't mind his jealousy; she would pander to his vanity, as long as she had love like this.

He caught her close in his arms, sought her lips, and, inexplicably, her mood changed. Had he been drinking too much?

"Chris—don't!"

She tried to push him away, laugh off her moment of panic.

"Come dance; you're crumpling me dreadfully."

"Not yet. You've accepted me now, kisses and all, you know."

He was laughing a little, too, under his breath, but there was an undercurrent of something far from mirth, of something not far from hostility itself, that they both felt. Christopher sensed her sudden aversion as if it were a tangible thing that, in his nearness, he could break down. He forced a kiss upon her unwilling mouth, and her revulsion of feeling engulfed her in a tide of distaste, of remorse at her broken word to Gilbert, of shame itself! And while she was still struggling to release herself, their privacy was invaded. Gilbert himself, white-faced, a cold glint in his eyes, stood on the threshold, dance program in hand.

Christopher sprang to his feet in cholerick confusion. Kate settled back against the cushions of the Chesterfield, both hands to her bright hair. Of the three, she seemed the least disconcerted.

"Go upstairs," Duncan ordered the boy. Then he turned on Kate savagely.

"Please, Gilbert—" she forestalled him, outwardly demure. "I'm more kissed against than kissing!"

"And I was fool enough to believe you when you promised to keep your hands off the boy!" His bitter scorn shriveled her flippancy.

"To believe in you, and trust you, and champion you, when no one else would—because no one else *could!* God, but you had me fooled, Kate!"

The rising torrent of his reproach and condemnation broke upon her from the crumbling dam of his traditional breeding, his professional self-restraint. He uttered cruel and bitter truths that hurt like a lash; he scored her mercilessly, brutally—and still despaired of his ability to voice the least of the passion and regret that filled his heart.

Pitiably pale, wide-eyed, and mute, she heard him out. Then, as he turned from her, dashed his hand across his eyes as if to dispel her vision, she put out her trembling hands, laid them on his shoulders.

"You've got to hear me," she demanded of him. "Gilbert, I tried, I honestly tried, to keep my word to you, but no one would let me—if they'd only been a little kinder—Gilbert, I haven't hurt him. Christopher loves me!"

"Poor devil," said Christopher's uncle. "And what is he getting for it? We Duncans love well, Kate!"

"A good, a faithful wife!" she cried. He stared at her, aghast.

"You mean you're going to marry him?"

"I'll make him happy!"

Ruthlessness possessed him. His hands closed like vises on her wrists.

"You'll cheat him, body and soul, if you do. The illusion of your youth won't last much longer, Kate; it's fading already, like your touched-up hair and your enameled good looks. And when it's gone—what else have you got to hold him with? Nothing but expert tricks, worn-out emotions. You're no mate for a boy; you're done with youth and its romantic adventures. Admit it!"

She tore herself out of his grasp, flung herself down upon the fatly upholstered divan, beating at the velvet with small clenched fists.

"It's not true," she raged at him. "I'm still young—still beautiful! Do you think I don't watch myself and guard against the faintest flaw, the least line—that I don't know?"

"And to-morrow, in spite of your vigilance, you'll be old! Old," he repeated brutally. "Or middle-aged, with painted, smirking old age around the corner. Bah!"

She collapsed in a crumpled heap of golden gown and heaving white shoulders, burst into a hot passion of tears. He watched her for a silent moment, trembling himself; and as she wept out her defeat before him, his torrential anger and disgust receded, left him weak and spent.

"You've taken all I had," she moaned. "You've left me nothing—nothing. I would have made him a good wife; I could have made him happy, for a little while. All I wanted was a little love—some one with whom I'd come first. There was no one but Chris—no one!"

"Don't!" he cried sharply. "What I said wasn't true, Kate!"

"Oh, it's true; that's why it's so cruel." She leaned back, no longer weeping, shielded her mouth with an inadequate, damp scrap of lace. Voice and eyes were desolate, heartbreaking.

He dropped to the edge of the divan, covered her limp left hand with his own, hardly knowing what he did.

"I'm thinking of your happiness, too, Kate. You didn't find it with Merlin; Christopher can't give it to you, either." He couldn't explain to her that a boy can give fealty only to an untarnished dream, an unsullied ideal. But she understood. And his touch thrilled her curiously, gave her a sense of protective tenderness.

"Sometimes," she said, giving him a gentle look, "I can't distinguish Christopher's uncle from—my old lover."

His heart missed a beat.

"Nor can I," he admitted. Only his luminous, middle-aged eyes, his hand

that still clasped hers warmly, amplified the confession. Phoenixlike, the perilous Kate of old rose from the damp ashes of her repentance.

"In that case," she suggested, "wouldn't it be less confusing if you definitely committed yourself?"

"Are you trying to make a fool of me now?" he cried, gripping her slight shoulders. "Fool or not, Kate—I could have made you happy!"

She looked up from the vanity case she had fished out. The mockery of her charming mouth did not faze him.

"Are you asking me to marry you, Gilbert, painted hag that I am?"

He breathed deep at her daring, tightened his hold upon her.

"Just that, Kate." He pulled out his watch. "It's not too late now; if you mean any of the things you've looked and said—if you mean to give up Christopher, you'll leave here now, come away with me, and marry me to-night. I'm taking no more chances with you!"

Her eyes flashed.

"You forget my touched-up hair, my enameled good looks!"

"Not at all. Neither of us can afford to lose any time," he explained coolly. "We'll get hold of old Judge Dampman—he plays checkers nightly from nine till twelve at the club, Christmas Eve not excepted—and go straight to his house. There'll be a few things to fix up, but we can be married in an hour and a half. Get your wrap!"

"Not like this," she protested, fired by the bold adventure of it all. "Let me go home first, change into a suit, and pack a bag. I'll meet you at Judge Dampman's within an hour. Thompson can drive me in."

"I suppose you'll come," he observed at last, "because you'll enjoy the sensation you'll cause. Here." He thrust a card with an imposing address upon it into her hand.

"I'll come," promised Kate, brilliant-eyed with conquest and something

more. "But, oh—what will Christopher think?"

"Damn Christopher," said Kate's lover, before he kissed her.

She did not see the boy when she went upstairs, but Gage detached himself from a group of dowagers and took advantage of her solitary state. She didn't like the way he eyed her flushed cheeks, her disordered hair.

"Who is he?" he chuckled. "And when are you going to sit out a dance or two with me?"

Kate ignored the pleasantry, smiled with set lips as Alice Gage nodded to her maliciously from chaperon's row.

"If you're looking for Christopher, Mrs. Merlin—he took advantage of your absence to take Susan in to supper."

Kate thanked her, swept by. And while Claggett chuckled comprehensively a delicious retaliation presented itself. She flicked the feathery tip of her fan across Gage's cheek.

"I'm not sitting out any more dances—but I've got to get in town to-night. Would you like to drive me in?"

"Would I?" murmured Gage, misreading the deviltry beneath her charming brows.

"Then meet me on the steps in five minutes," she directed demurely.

It was very late indeed when Mrs. Gage, who was chaperoning Susan, decided to leave. She was used to Claggett's disappearing at dances for a quiet session of poker, so his absence had only annoyed her, but when he could not be found she waxed uneasy. Her eyes roved the ballroom and foyer for a glimpse of a gold brocade gown. They—she bracketed them in that first unpleasant moment—were not in the supper room or the lounge or on the stairs. She remembered that Christopher had been seeking Mrs. Merlin an hour ago. Tight-lipped, she ordered her machine

to be brought around. And then the blow fell. •

The club doorman and two attendant lackeys had been having a jolly half hour at her expense since one of the chauffeurs had spread the word of her husband's compromising departure. She knew that as she learned how long he and Mrs. Merlin had been gone. Let it be said, in all fairness to Mrs. Gage, that she behaved very well. Not through her should her husband's indiscretions leak out! She went back to the ballroom with a passably casual air. But her *noblesse oblige* did not serve her that night. Servants talk, especially after two in the morning, and others, less interested than she, were speculating upon the disappearance of always-noticeable Kate.

A woman she had snubbed periodically hoped that Mr. Gage hadn't met with an accident. One or two others were sympathetic. Between dances people talked, in an amused, well-bred way, of course.

She sat back against the wall, forcing her lips into a muscular smile, and tried to ignore the genuine smiles and whispers and lifted brows that met her sharp eyes and ears at every turn.

And then Christopher, in the supper room, caught the ball of scandal.

The girl at his left was embellishing the tale dexterously.

"Hours ago," she giggled. "Goodness knows where they are now! And Mrs. Gage is sitting up against the wall, pretending she doesn't know a thing about it, when I heard the doorman tell her myself. Isn't it romantic? And some one heard Mrs. Merlin tell him to drive her home first, so she could throw some things into a suit case—"

The boy rose to his feet in bewildered horror. Susan, who had condescended to be gracious to him for more than an hour, was forgotten.

"Gone—with Claggett Gage?" he mumbled, pale as wax.

"Eloped. Two hours ago!" She let the boy beside her light a fresh cigarette from hers. "Isn't it lovely and romantic, Chris? Of course, they've been carrying on like mad ever since she came to town—"

He never quite knew how he left the dance, that was lasting late, with the generous brew of Christmas punch, after he had looked in vain for his uncle, whose disappearance no one had noticed. Or how he got home, and let himself in quietly, so as not to disturb his mother—he couldn't face her, or any one, just then—not even his uncle, though the sight of his closed door spurred him to impotent wrath. What had he said to Kate, when he caught them in the lounge, that had driven her to this frantic folly? And then, stumbling up to his room, he laughed, or sobbed, under his breath. Nothing could vindicate her now! She had indeed proved the gossip justified.

The boy flung himself face down upon the bed, conjured up her radiant image, as she had looked, smiling up at Gage, when he found them on the steps. No wonder she had smiled! What hurt most was not his rage at Gilbert's interference, nor his hatred of sleek Gage himself—damn him!—nor even Kate's loss; but her trickery. A youth's vanity is a vulnerable thing. A hurt rendered it is never quite forgotten, but it often saves youth from a more mortal thrust. He shed an unmanly tear or two into the friendly pillow; he cursed, sobbingly, women and the idols men make of them. And then, because he was horribly tired, and only a boy, he fell asleep.

It was thus that Gilbert's tired wife found him, an hour later, when Gilbert had brought her home.

Perhaps he was dreaming of her; he stirred, flung up an arm above his head with a sleepy, little-boy gesture that went to her heart, and she dropped to her knees beside him.

"Chris—wake up, and say you forgive me."

He opened his eyes, raised himself.

"You've come back?" he demanded incredulously. "Come back *here*?"

And then, in an April voice, she told him what she had done. It was his uncle who, still in furry motoring coat, and gloves, came in to break the spell of his dismay. "Have you squared yourself?" he inquired of Kate. "It was a rotten trick, I know, old boy!"

Christopher stared at her in this guise. Something had happened, something more deadly far than her supposed elopement. She sensed that scrutiny of his, stepped out of the unkind morning light.

"It's all right." He found himself magnanimous, but he wished they would leave him. He felt unshaven, embarrassed.

"Dear boy!" She ran her fingers through his tousled hair—he always hated that. Then they had the grace to get out.

He sat on the edge of the bed for a long time, reconstructing his world. The pieces fitted far better than he even hoped they would. His aunt. *Aunt!*

He reached down, pulled out the treasure chest of boyhood relics that reposed under his bed. And in the heterogeneous mess within he found what he sought—a dilapidated waxen doll, with matted hair, robed in tarnished gilt. His Christmas angel!

"Not bright and new, as she used to be—a little out of curl," Kate had said. He smiled, dropped the flabby thing into the wastebasket beside his desk, and turned again to the treasure chest. Susan's photograph answered his smile. He picked it up, stood it in its old place of honor upon his bureau, and, because the Christmas bells were calling the faithful forth to early mass, and a faint, saucy suggestion of breakfast hung about the house, he went whistling toward the bathroom and a cold tub.

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The Holly Day

By Gertrude Brooke Hamilton

Author of "The Vanity Case," "A Maid-of-All-Play," etc.

Whatever our days, there is one day universally emotional. If we are hurt on that day, the cut goes deep—Christmas—

EVEN if there had been no light in the hall hung with fragrant evergreens, Miriam would have seen. She could not help seeing, as she let herself into the shabby old house, where to-morrow the festival of good will toward all men would be celebrated.

In the instant of opening the door, her eyes were alight with the spirit of the season and her step had the high tread of youth. With the closing of the door, Miriam Norn had witnessed confusion in two faces loved by her, and had experienced the agony of a first confusion in her spirit: under the mistletoe, limned like an indelible picture for her memory, Ricky and Lola—his lips on hers—

Even if there had been no light in the hall, Miriam would have seen!

She stood with some snow-powdered parcels in her arms, looking at Roderick Derrick, her Ricky, to whom she'd been engaged through an idyllic year—and at Lola Kindling, her closest friend.

She repeated their names aloud.

Lola essayed a laugh; she was the type to do so, white-toothed, dark-eyed, a picturesque fashion artist for whom holiday space had been found in the house in Cleveland where Miriam and her brother, Penn, made their home.

"I was putting up the mistletoe——" she began.

And Lola reached up and broke off a cluster of white berries and thornless leaves.

"I'll hang this in another place, Mira; just to show you it might have been your brother." Her lips were provocative in laughter.

Miriam's color was high, flaring higher. A need for some sort of action made her lay her bundles on the hall table.

Eyes and lips aided Lola to extricate herself from the moment, by the subterfuge of carrying off the bit of mistletoe to Penn's working quarters on the second floor of the abode where an architectural sign was permissible amid gabled residences lingering before the encroaching tide of commerce.

Miriam and Roderick were left together in the festooned hall.

Beneath the phosphorescent fungus linked by legend with kissing time, and suspended from a low rafter above the foot of the stairs, Ricky stood in an attitude of natural agitation, his face overflushed, his eyes very blue, his lovable mouth quelled by the same masculine confusion that set upon his shoulders, and his slightly rumpled hair.

The color in Miriam's cheeks flared to such scarlet that she put her palms to them.

Ricky began to pace the hall, where

the cracked jardinière was full of blue-berried cedar, the long, faded wall was hung with holly wreaths, the pictures were festooned with garlands, and over the old stairs hung mistletoe, mistletoe!

He was first to speak.

"A thing like this is hard to explain, Mira."

Her delicate nostrils dilated a fraction.

"Don't try to explain, Ricky."

"What can I say? What can I do?"

"Nothing."

"But I, we meant nothing by it!" Ricky was stricken. The floor he paced creaked underfoot, suggestive of many seasons of good and ill cheer. "It was only foolery, Mira. Only a mistletoe kiss."

She had eyes that could radiate her face into mobility, beneath its mane of cloudy hair. A face afire with sensibilities, in emotion. She said, quivering, "Your kisses aren't all mine—and that knowledge hurts."

"Darling!" cried Ricky, contrite.

By an effort of self-control, she put out her hands for the parcels she'd laid down.

He halted before her; her energetic and handsome fiancé, superintendent of the ore docks that contribute material prosperity to the city of Cleveland. He was a big young chap, abounding in vitality.

Miriam continued to take up conglomerate shapes in wrapping paper, some of them with gala seals, none of them conveying much significance now!

Ricky took hold of her arm clumsily.

"Mira," with intense compunction, "I was the damndest of fools for a second; I don't know why."

"Then why talk of it, Rick?"

"There must be something I can say!"

"Is there?"

"If you'll listen——"

"But I shan't listen!" The uptilt of

her shapely head disclaimed a rush of tears.

Flight carried her past him swiftly; she was one of those girls who move so lightly that they seem shod with mercury.

Ricky followed to the newel post. He sought to bring her to his arms with, "dear, dearest girl, come to me! Don't be a prude. Come."

She paused, a step above him, aflame.

"This isn't prudery."

"Isn't it assuming a superior virtue?" he demanded. "Sweetheart, are we quarreling? You and I, under the mistletoe——"

"Ricky, no!" She fled another step away.

"Mira, beloved! You're crying!"

Tears were coming, hotly—the indignity of his lips on another woman's, even in laughter! It was like a whip laid on her, an affront to her every attribute in the love tracks. She was no prig; yet——

Miriam Norn wrenched the engagement solitaire from her finger, and laid it on the newel post.

Blindly she ran up the stairs.

His outcry followed, "Mira! Miriam!"

She went on, in tears.

From the top, she went as the sightless go by familiar ways toward a higher staircase, around the dim turn of her brother's working quarters, a turning unlighted as yet, a dusky labyrinth.

In her stormy progress, her armful of parcels were scattered by a collision with some one coming the other way at a saunter.

She had run, full tilt, into a client of her brother's named Willoughby, whose tremendously wealthy aunt of Shore Road was having her winter gardens remodeled by the young landscape architect.

Willoughby gave their precipitant meeting a neat twist.

"A dark turning sometimes turns the trend of a life, Miss Norn." The rather neutral looks of Willoughby were offset by a voice of singularly melodious timbre and by an ease of manner that rounded any sharp curve.

Miriam let the impediment to her tears gather up her bundles. Her slight breathlessness in the semidarkness was not caused by the encounter.

"Penn always forgets to light up."

Willoughby counted her parcels.

"Six—is that right? Lucky girl, to have a half-dozen beloveds."

"But there were seven," half a catch in her cadence. She found the match safe, and struck a flame for the old-fashioned gas bracket.

"Seven to love?" Willoughby discovered the last gift parcel on the ledge of the stairs. He brought it to her.

If the flare of the gas jet revealed to him a face vivified by an emotional storm, turbulent color, eyes brilliant with unshed tears, lips curved tumultuously, he gave no sign of his perceptions. Yet there might have been a shade of speculation in his retention of her bundles.

Miriam held out her hands for them.

"Thank you."

"I'm sure you're welcome." Willoughby had a smile magnetic as his voice, if less likable.

Her color fluctuated, surmising that he lingered because some quality in her expression interested him; she tarried to refute her swift taking of a quiet turn.

"Penn says if I don't slow my steps I'll run into my shadow some day." She managed lightness. And the sound of the hall door closing with Ricky's slam sent her color higher!

Willoughby covered her recurrent emotion with a pleasantry.

"Your brother is going to make the run with me out to my aunt's place during the holidays. If you like shadows, my aunt overshadows even her gar-

dens!" He gave a delightful grimace. "No sixes and sevens of love at our place, my aunt's, y'know." He lifted his stick to set a holly wreath swinging on the dingy wall.

Miriam, conscious of Roderick's step out on the snowy avenue, put up an involuntary hand to slow the circle of holly. Her fingers accidentally touched an end of Willoughby's stick, gold-tipped.

He chatted informally of his aunt—whose estates on the Lake Shore were famous.

"She's a largely shadowed old lady, a magnificent Tartar. If she hung up anything seasonable, 'twould be money wreaths, garlands of greenbacks, and the sort of berries we keep in our bank stockings. She doesn't give love packages even to me, her heir. But she's worth the run; so's the place. I'd like to show you over it. Will you come with your brother?"

In nodding to Willoughby, Miriam was barely cognizant of the invitation—hearing Lola's laugh in the quarters near the turning.

Her swift tread carried her on, to a staircase in shadow.

Willoughby stood looking after her a bit curiously.

The darker flight had no turning. She took it soundlessly.

Under the gables, she closed the door of her own room after her, let the Christmas packages fall in a heap—and sank into a heap herself. With the freshest of tears, she let it rush over her that she'd broken off with Ricky, who'd broken faith with her! He'd broken faith with her! It amounted to that, let him taunt her with prudery as he would! Her head fell forward on her crossed arms. Sobs shook her slim body. Roderick had made love to Lola, even if only for one mad moment, her big young Ricky! And she, Miriam, was in a fever of desertion. She was through with Ricky, through—through

with that complete assurance in men and women which keeps the spirit clear enough to riddle its own delicacies. Through with first, fine, careless raptures, that might never be recaptured. Through with little Christmas parcels of love. Through! Through! Through! Her tears seemed breaking down idyllic fastholds, loosening the ties that bound her, rushing her afar——

She slipped prostrate, weeping unendurably.

II.

The evergreens were still garlanding the shabby house when Miriam went with her brother and Willoughby out to the Lake Shore gardens that Penn was remodeling for Willoughby's aunt.

The gardens under glass covered an acre of the landscape, and would be a marvel when finished. They were in keeping with the large, white-walled, Gothic residence of stone, with square towers. Willoughby drove the Norns over the place. Miriam liked most of all the stud of thoroughbreds, delicate, whinnying nostrils, slender, restive ankles! Yet there was allurements in the miniature lakes, ice-skirted, in symmetrical woods snow-crustured, in granite-gray drives. While Penn attended to the details of his visit, Willoughby took Miriam up to his aunt's favorite view, reached by a road bordered with silver pines of gigantic growth to the great rock of the crest. The outlook was majestic in its compass. Northward they looked over Lake Erie and the ore docks, eastward was the shore boulevard and Rockefeller Park, southward were the city spires gilded by the midwinter sun, a panorama, of little public squares, avenues, and circles, dotted by human beings. Directly below them the jagged precipice of the rock glimmered with quartz, at its base the dazzling contrast of black rock and snowdrifts.

Miriam stood within a foot of the

rock's edge, colored a bit vividly by the view.

"How splendid life might be!" she exclaimed.

Willoughby had this to say of life. "Only it isn't."

Her color waned.

"No," the myriad shadows of the scene in her eyes, "it isn't."

Any one so graceful as Miriam Norn, with shades of confusion in eyes where life seemed vagrantly straining at its leash, inspired a speculative pause.

But it was too cold to remain for long on the crest. So they soon went down to the garden acreage, where Penn and his plans were being bullied by a very large old lady of good-tempered verbosity.

Willoughby's aunt was a personage. Of majestic proportions, with massive waves of gray hair and eyebrows whose mismatched arch conveyed both malice and whimsy, her arrogant nose bridge flaunted glasses with a fashionable ribbon and her gown of greyhound satin was topped by a voluminous cloak of chinchilla.

Her voice was unlike her nephew's, intrusively commanding.

"But, my dear Norn, these aren't the gardens of Eden," she was saying to Penn. "Unbroken lines? Stuff and nonsense! There'll be no slim Eve to wander through them, for Willy's undoing——" She broke off to look at her heir's companion, and to take a second glance, with an eyebrow acock.

Whether it was the unbroken lines of Miriam's grace, or the really excellent garden plans, Willoughby's very wealthy legator ordained that the Norns remain for tea.

After a half hour of grandeur and grandiose caviling, Willoughby's aunt ignored her landscape architect to turn her nose glasses on his young sister. She subjected Miriam Norn to a running fire of questions, that showed her an old lady of sudden, violent pendants

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—Did the girl ride? Had she seen the stud of thoroughbreds? Did she know that she bore a resemblance to an unbroken pedigree colt? Was she fond of wide views? Could she keep her head on rough water? Could she hold her own in a combat? Her conclusions were evidently formulated without formality.

She gave a great nod over a tea cart devoid of holiday garniture.

"I like the spirited look in your eye, my dear. I'm not at all a likable old hullabaloo, myself. In fact, I'm barbarous enough to enjoy putting pretty impertinence down, running it to cover. You don't know, because nobody has told you, of my idiosyncrasies. One of 'em is to spend seven months of the year abroad. I sometimes like company, if coltish. This is my year for Continental Europe. My dear child," rising weightily and so bringing the tea party to a close, "I've a notion to take you across seas with me. I sail some time this month. Will you go?"

Miriam colored.

"May I think it over?" she asked Willoughby's aunt.

"I'll give you till New Year's Day."

"Thank you; I'll let you know by then."

"You'll come, I know. You've a bit of world hunger in your eyes."

"Have I? But—let me think till New Year's."

"Go think, if young things ever do." Willoughby's aunt then derived obvious satisfaction in chagrining her nephew by sending for her own chauffeur to drive the Norns home.

Miriam was taking down evergreens on the last day of the old year, and still weighing the commandeering invitation to go abroad with Willoughby's aunt, when Roderick Derrick came impetuously to the old gabled residence which had roofed their first kiss.

Ricky was for overlooking the week of separation and silence.

"You mustn't go, Mira!" he cried, having heard the news from Penn.

But it was Roderick who'd silenced a chime in Miriam. Her very gladness at the sight of his anxious face was out of tune with love. She had an incongruous desire to kiss Ricky, and to laugh.

"Not go?" she repeated, scarlet-checked.

"To Europe, with an old faddist who likes the spectacular and has money enough to command it," said Ricky wrathfully. He was pacing the long parlors, where the creaking floors and faded furniture made him appear abounding young. "You won't come back the same if you go. I'll lose you for keeps. I haven't lost you yet because of that tomfoolery——" There came over his features a certain confusion; as if any undue imprudence in her might be laid at his door!

Roderick put his hands on the back of a chair facing her.

"Let's forgive and forget. You've given me a week without you. Aren't we quits?"

Her lips quivered a little.

"Not until the prude has had her 'foolery,' perhaps."

"Mira!" But, in coming around the chair, his protests were for himself. "Men are like that. The most decent of them. If a girl looks up laughing—— Oh, confound it all, Mira! It was just that. Nothing more." His demonstrative hands caught her by the shoulders, and he all but put a glowing cheek to hers. "Be generous. I was at fault. I love you, only you." There were strong currents in his virile young hands.

There were currents in her lifting look. Yet the way she put light palms to her cheeks held scant swing of forgetfulness. She had been in harmony

with the universe, and he had set her senses jangling into discord.

"It's—hard to explain, Ricky."

He made the mistake of trying to explain with his arms.

"Harder to feel this way!" Less youth in her utterance.

"What way, Mira?" He was pleading for her lips.

Her mouth was curving into estrogan loveliness.

"Hard," she said, of love. And her arms freed her, more definitely.

"For such a little blunder!" cried out Ricky, turning to go.

She attempted to analyze an emotional medley.

"I—couldn't risk hurts like that all the way."

He turned at the door fiercely.

"There was no real infidelity in it."

"There was its shadow."

Ricky leveled an agitated young finger at her.

"Admitting that; if you go off with these Willoughbys, won't they hurt you all the way?"

"They won't be—you," unevenly.

"And you won't be you when they're through with you!" he flung from the threshold.

"I'll be through with love hurts."

"And I'll be loving you! No matter how far I've sent you by hurting you, I'll be loving you!" Roderick's parting outcry, before the door slammed after him, was like an ultimate sound in desolation.

Miriam flung herself into a chair. In the parlors half dismantled of festive greens, mistletoe and holly in a conglomerate heap, she passionately told herself that she was through with Ricky! She turned all her thoughts on a sojourn in far countries. The world! Her face cloudy, her cheeks burning, she impulsively wrote Willoughby's aunt a graceful line in anticipation of Europe.

There came a return line in a large

chirography, giving Miriam the date of departure.

She bade Roderick Derrick *au revoir* over a telephone wire.

"I love you!" said Ricky's stricken young voice.

She was volatile enough, loving him, to retort, "Tomfoolery."

There were still a few holly wreaths in windows here and there when Miriam left her home city, in conjunction with the Willoughby luggage, and the Willoughbys; the nephew to go as far as the New York docks.

Came a stop-over in a big metropolitan hostelry, designated a "holdup" house by the overvoiced old plutocrat. Then the sailing; with Willoughby to see them off, and a deal of bickering over the location of the cabin engaged. Followed days of sky and water, that might have been dazzling but for a cheerful bullyragging of even the elements!

Landing at Liverpool gave Willoughby's aunt a chance to take down impertinent customs officials; she petered them out magnificently. A trip to Paris by aeroplane afforded an opportunity to reduce a nice aviator to a discreet silence. From Paris to Genoa; and, in violent rains that swept along the coast, laid the dust, and washed the face of nature, by steamer to Naples—blue skies and tapers, and no evergreens.

In Naples, during dinner on a balcony commanding a view toward Capri and the open sea, they had a third over the party-colored ices; Willoughby.

He came upon them as from the Lake Shore.

"I wanted to see auntie, so I made the sail." He shook hands with first one and then the other.

"So I made the sail," he repeated, over Miriam's fingers.

Willoughby's aunt knitted her brows over his arrival. Most imposing in Chantilly lace, she surveyed her heir with a knowing expression.

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"So *that's* the way the wind blows!" she remarked.

She turned to Miriam with a conclusive nod of her elaborate coiffure.

"Child, look out for Willy. He's a speculator. He makes risky investments for slim profit."

Miriam, very slim in bare-shouldered dinner gown of rose chiffon, sent the pleasant bogy who had joined them an intrepid glance.

Willoughby held the insouciant eyes, in blowing candlelight.

"Are you having a good time?" he asked her, smiling.

"Nonsense!" intercepted his aunt largely. She fixed a pair of protuberant eyes upon him. "You surmised that she *couldn't* be having a good time with me, so you extracted a few coppers from your allowance money to make a timely appearance. Next, you'll be asking her to take a holiday with you. Fie! Penny-a-pound passion!"

Willoughby held up his hands.

"And I crossed the ocean just to be with you, auntie."

"Stuff!" His aunt let her nose glasses dangle, and put a ringed finger along an arrogant nostril.

She spoke with her usual gusto.

"Just to thwart any delightful scheming in your unpraiseworthy mind, I've a notion to marry you to her. You're not the marrying sort. And she's a graceless hoity-toity. I've a notion!" She surveyed both of them, with her wide relish for putting people down.

"Don't let us set *you* scheming, auntie," expostulated Willoughby.

Miriam finished her ice, risking no argument.

The very rich old lady brought a large hand down on the damask with a force that set her rings jingling.

"I'll do it!" she vowed. "She hasn't a penny. Neither have you. I'll tie you up, my dears."

He could but flush, at last.

"Ha!" quick to triumph over his

5—Ains.

change of color. "You crossed the ocean to greet her. Yet your heels are tickling you to flee matrimony, eh?" One of her eyebrows was acock.

The sweep of Willoughby's hand was not unlike hers. He sat at ease in his balcony chair overlooking a bay already silvered by a Neapolitan moon.

"I'm game," he stated; not looking at Miriam.

His aunt turned on the girl.

"You're in luck. He'll have pots of money when I *make-up* my mind to die. My wits have outwitted any naughty scheming of his so far. What do you say to marrying my heir?"

Miriam fixed her eyes in amazement on the broad and exceedingly worldly countenance of her patroness. There was a glint of gayety in her reply.

"Why, I say 'no,' of course."

"I'd have thought less of you had you said 'yes,'" candidly. "But it really matters very little what you say. Money is an obdurate matchmaker, my dear. Its eccentricities must be toadied to. Or smash goes the weasel." The nose glasses were fitted with nicety.

Miriam broke into a rill of laughter.

"Then smash it goes."

Willoughby's aunt reddened a bit.

"You're an impertinent young woman, but I'm getting fond of you."

She turned the nose glasses on her nephew.

"Well, well; when are you to begin courting? Shy, eh, of honest pursuit? You have my blessing. Go ahead." She gave emphasis to her newborn wish by blowing out the candles and rising. Then yards of Chantilly lace were swept to the other end of the balcony, where the majestic back of Willoughby's aunt shone powdery under the opulent Italian moon.

Willoughby's modulated laugh held a tinge of malice.

"Isn't she an old terror? How've you ever stood her?"

He looked a bit long across the smok-

ing tapers, at a very charming young woman in rose drapery, whose eyes were always shadowed and whose mouth was prone to light compression.

"What are we going to do about this fancy of hers to marry us off? She's conscienceless if frustrated. Hadn't we better avoid possible persecution by giving in gracefully?"

Miriam set a snuffer over a candle-wick.

"You're not in earnest?"

His voice pitched nearly to melody.

"I'm afraid I am."

Her fingers lifted delicately.

"But I'm not in earnest."

"And auntie is."

"I'm not." She rose, with one of her swift movements.

On his feet, he was close enough to touch her.

"Leaving auntie out, I'm afraid I am!"

She turned to the balcony railing, speaking half over her shoulder.

"In earnest; you?"

"Yes; in my penny-a-pound passion," inaudibly.

She was unprepared for the touch of his lips on the averting curve of her shoulder, cold lips that made the picture of Ricky and Lola under her eyelids blur youthfully—mirth, foolery, meaningless if culpable passions; there were worse blunders along the way!

Then Willoughby had stepped back, and was regarding her in instant speculation as to the quiver that ran over her.

His tones were no less unsteady.

"Let's go earnest; in this soft, delicious land you've drawn me to! Land of moon mists. Naples, and the gift of you!" His one fascination was a voice that could wantonly produce sheer earthy music. "Shall we marry, Mira?"

The suffusion of her face shadowed it.

"No."

Willoughby looked the length of the balcony. He sighed, and half laughed. "You'll set your will up against—

auntie's?"

Her eyes followed his. She was silent.

"If you don't toady to millions, you'll regret it," he warned. "For millions can crush, y'know; smash the pretty weasels."

She rallied, flicking a shapely finger on the railing.

"Let them."

"You're young yet in world wisdom. Balk wealth, and it befores you. It lets fall upon you a rain of inescapable mists. There's no safety for you anywhere, if you snap your fingers at money."

"M-o-n-e-y," spelled Miriam's forefinger on the railing.

They were silent for a few moments.

He then said leisurely, "So you won't take me on auntie's terms, as a husband?"

"Not on any terms." Her eyes were dark in the moonlight.

Willoughby gave a pleasant grimace.

He did the tactful thing of moving away, to join his aunt at her end of the balcony; below which the steep city ran down precipitantly to a bay whose glassy waters mirrored shadows of castled heights, stair cañons and balconies; moon shadows of an ancient scene.

Miriam put a cooling palm against the luster of her shoulder.

But by the next morning, the disturbing Willoughby was gone. He left his aunt to make his adieus.

The despotic old humorist was equal to the task, warning Miriam that her nephew had departed in a mood of unwonted abstraction; teeming with scheming, she phrased it. And she had made up her mind to marry the penniless Norn beauty to her heir, married they should be, willy-nilly. She pursued

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the fleet Miriam with her large, worldly eyes, and with words.

From Naples they went to Florence; then to Bologna; and across the Po to old Padua; then the liquid streets of Venice, the city in the sea—arguments concerning matrimony with Willoughby all the way. Leaves had been verdant and were scarlet, when their faces were at last set toward home. How panoramic the world! How terrible a clever, tireless tongue!

Miriam Norn said good-by to Willoughby's aunt at the New York docks.

She might have returned to her own State had not a letter from Penn contained the news of his marriage to Lola Kindling. Lola and Penn! He wrote that they were leaving the old house for a small apartment; the letter held a brotherly contribution to her purse. And Roderick? She had not heard from him since going off with the Willoughbys, not since his wrathful young finger had been leveled at her, in telling her the world would change her. Was it changing her? Shelterless, she could face a metropolis without ties or much money, and find its rapid, troubled currents vagrantly challenging. Why return? Love was but a jangling chime. Life was a jingle of jester's bells.

Miriam remained in the metropolis.

On the heels of the parting with Willoughby's aunt there came to the small Gramercy hotel which housed Miriam's cloudy head, Willoughby, in humor disarmingly genial.

His mission was a pleasant one. There had been lately introduced at the horse show a breed imported from Arabia, and an exhibition of the matchless steeds along the bridle path of Riverside Drive was imminent. Half a dozen society buds and stage favorites were to ride the Arabian beauties. The patron of the pageant was putting up a trophy cup of a thousand dollars for the rider best matching her mount in grace. The judges were a group of world-re-

nowned artists. Would Miriam like to be the seventh rider?

"But I'm neither social light nor stage celebrity," she told Willoughby, a bit curious of the honor.

"You ride very well, y'know." His equable tone betrayed no recollection of Neapolitan moonlight, or eccentric notions. "Enter the competition," he urged with friendly interest, "Make the dash for the thousand. Join the riders."

She held his glance, half interrogative, wholly aware that her graceful, obscure name was unharbored, these days. Yet with love afar, life was calling her.

Adrift, Miriam allowed Willoughby to carry off her name as an entry in the riding pageant on the Drive.

A tang in the river winds showed how the cycle of the year was swinging when she rode in the pageant a mount from Araby, fleet as the air currents. The animate splendor of delicately wild horses above the shimmering blues of the Hudson! To Miriam Norn's light-bodied grace was awarded the thousand-dollar cup. Alone, she rode the lengths of the bridle path. A high moment was hers. What was a holly prick in her heart? The world was a mammoth place. She would ride through, without lovers, by the grace of herself. She would step under the sort of mistletoe that Mammon hangs over many a cloudy head. Plaudits! A pageant! M-o-n-e-y!

One of life's drifts of ephemeral gaiety was hers after the pageant.

Abroad with Willoughby's aunt, she had felt the purchasing power of money in bulk. Now she experienced the fragmentary delights of those graceful tokens indubitably linked with easy spending—exotic flowers, delicious viands, the opera, a multiplicity of shows, superfine dance music, the latest books, bonbons; Willoughby made these favors hers, willy-nilly. And it was through Willoughby, in a pleasure whirl

that only dallied very slightly with the emotions, that she sent some of her trophy money down to the whirlpool of Wall Street. It whirled back, trebled. Her spirits were mercurial enough to rate Willoughby a Magi wise in the ways of the Street, a bringer of gold, and frankincense and myrrh!

But mistletoe and laughter have their season.

It was when the pretty weasel with head in the clouds pooled her all in the Street that she lost.

The consolation roses from Willoughby were tall as herself, resplendent as the snows that were beginning to powder the town. She need not have feared his coming on the heels of his flowers to solace her. For, at the dark turning of her fortunes, Willoughby dropped out. How fickle the world! How inexplicable the ways of men!

Oddly, she had formed no other ties in the fog bank of the metropolis.

Her dearer ties? She had not written Penn of late. And it seemed æons since the days of love, and Roderick.

Miriam Norn was at low ebb, and hunting fruitlessly for some means of livelihood when a truck of evergreens delayed her at a crossing one day.

Christmas was coming again!

III.

The approach of Christmas in the big town. Charity pots and bells at the corners. Fir trees set up at café entrances. Swelling crowds at parcel-post stations. Shop windows of toys. Greeting cards in the subway kiosks. Mistletoe venders. Holly, holly, holly!

The contents of her mail box on the morning of Christmas Eve: her overdue hotel bill, a menu of the hostelry's dinner de luxe, and a nameless card that resembled nothing so much as a comic valentine; a clever pen-and-ink sketch of a girl bereft of all save a cloud of hair riding an unbroken colt on con-

crete, a holiday tribute intangibly linked with tyrannical irony!

Irony, too, the box of holly delivered to her by a messenger. Thorns and scarlet berries! From whom? Holly somehow roused the panic of being far from home, of being homeless and afar.

Miriam put in a long-distance call for Penn—and after a brief interim was given *Willoughby's* voice on the wire.

The easy voice overlapped the lapse since the consolation roses.

"I was thinking of you but now. Greetings!"

This usurping of her wire did not lessen a sense of something like condensed vapor suspended over her, mists that might descend upon her. She spoke on light guard, of the card in her mail.

"It was so insultingly witty that a Willoughby must have sent it."

He disclaimed any affront aimed at her.

"The card?" quizzingly.

She managed surface cadence, her eyes stormy.

"It really matters very little. Very little."

His response was for the turbidity he could not see.

"Lonely?"

She overlooked the low-keyed query by a counterquestion.

"From where are you speaking; Cleveland?"

"No. From Riverside Drive. Ever since auntie's last toot abroad, we've had a house overshadowing the bridge path."

Her shadowed eyes went to a gold trophy cup.

As if he surmised the direction of her eyes, and their query he said:

"I cut in on your wire to warn you of a call from me to-day. I may come?"

The timbre of his voice took an affirmative for granted.

She hung up the receiver, knowing Willoughby would call.

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moment, brows contracted over eyes that held no radiance. Without glancing into a mirror, she dressed for her holiday guest.

In a lobby decorated with hotel evergreens, she greeted him.

Willoughby wheeled two great red-leather chairs to semiseclusion in the gala lounge.

"It's good to see you again!" he said.

She seated herself with an assumption of gayety.

"At this season, isn't it good to see any one from a home State?"

Willoughby's neutral looks made him appear an agreeable dropper-in.

"I took the trouble before coming downtown to find out who sent you the witty card," he told her with his well-tuned enunciation. "It was auntie."

He leaned back in the leather chair.

"She had one of the artists who passed judgment in the Arabian parade do the sketch. Auntie, y'know, put up the prize money. She meant you to win it, queer old dear. So the judges wisely favored you."

Miriam bit her lip.

"Wisely," she acknowledged less gayly.

Sitting at ease, his regard of her slipped into a survey of her cloudy hair, her shadowed eyes, the faint suggestion of tremor to her mouth, her colorless skin, her long light lines, the grace that carries off shabby habiliments.

He chatted as of a seasonable topic.

"I warned you that auntie was an old devil when crossed. 'Twas she who set me to dizzily mending your fortunes, and leaving you—broke."

The eyes Miriam leveled to his scrutiny were intent. Color was creeping up to her cheeks.

He watched the scarlet mantle the delicately cut face.

"But—why?" she said; of her rise and fall.

Willoughby leaned forward. His explanation was not ambiguous.

"We want you."

She brought her hands together.

His speculative fingers took a card from his pocket.

"One of auntie's, with a command for you." He read her a line on the card. "'Come up to my house on the Drive this noon, and be married, child.'"

He laid the bit of pasteboard on the arm of her chair. A sociable flow of words concerning his aunt was belied by a quality less impersonal.

"I wonder if she really means this message to you, penniless beauty. She's fond of you. But she generally turns a trick at the finish. And I doubt if she'd ever be cruel enough to tie me up. I'm not made for ties, y'know. She knows me." He sighed.

On a lower pitch, of himself:

"I'm not one of those persons who love. But I can covet a girl with a magnetism all her own, a sort of cloudy lightness, a light cloud. I want to pull the cloud down to earth, to me. I'll marry you, if auntie wills it. I'm not sure she does. I've this suggestion—come up to the Drive to-day and bear whatever witticism she may spring. Then, having been well broken, I surmise you'll be free. You'll be your own mistress then. I—want you, Mira!" The last words, in his mellow, fluent voice, held a meaning unmistakable, its every inflection placing her in the light category, a butt for witticisms, and worse.

She did not lift her eyes. She sat erect, colorless as he.

Willoughby rose.

He touched her hand in going.

An upward sweep of her fingers knocked the card from the arm of her chair. She picked it up to read the line scrawled above the name and present address of Willoughby's aunt.

"Come up to my house on the Drive this noon, and be married, child."

In the lobby where she sat, some one passed by with traveling bags; going

somewhere for the festival of good will to-morrow. There was a tree in the lobby hung with multicolored incandescents, for the delectation, and torment, of life's transients. In the restaurant, a medley of home melodies were being fiddled, overfast.

Then—out on the concretes a street singer's blatant caroling,

"Love was born on Christmas Day,
Wreathe the holly, twine the bay."

The animate tread that carried her to her room held no hint of inner tumult.

In the sanctuary of the old Norm house, she had closed her door on another fit of weeping; through with love, through with little gift parcels, through! Through? She stood now in the center of a room whose appointments offered no homy solace—astounded at the way in which she had blundered. How little she had known of life's passions, their momentary, errant gusts, in adjudging Roderick monstrously unfaithful! He'd been banished. She'd gone abroad. Naples and tapers, and foreign emotions. Home shores. She might, then, have gone back. But she'd tarried to ride an Arabian steed, and to be escorted through a series of light adventures by a man shallow enough to make and break her fortunes, at the instigation of moneyed malice. Gold, and frankincense, and myrrh? She'd not written Penn and Lola as affection writes, frequently. She'd not written once to Ricky, not once! Her holiday mail held a dun, an insult from an old despot, holly from—her hireling, like as not. On long distance, Willoughby's voice had cut in. Willoughby. Blunders!

To-morrow was Christmas.

The love day. The holly day. The day for love that casteth out fear. A day set apart for love housed and warmed, in harmony with creation, love that had somewhere to lay its head, and in sanctity and peace worked out love's miracles by repeopleing the world with

littler loves; love normal and human, shadowed by the divine, by chimes ringing out the birth of Love, by the Star shining over the lowly places, by evergreens, symbols of immortality—love, love, love!

And the loveless? Set apart, fearful, contributing nothing to creation, with nowhere to lay their heads, no sanctity, no Littler loves, no normality; what chimes rang for them, what star shone over their hostelries, what symbols of immortality had they—to-morrow?

Her weeping held her upright, lest she fall.

It was the sort of weeping that strangely shames one when discovered. Miriam's outflung hands warded off an unceremonious opening of her door.

On the threshold stood the fur-clad figure of Willoughby's aunt.

Miriam's hands decried such intrusion!

But her other holiday caller, prodigious in sables, entered and closed the door.

"Crying, child?"

The girl could not stop crying. She was in the grip of such desolation that she continued to cry with her head up and her submerged eyes alien.

Willoughby's aunt produced a handkerchief from her sable cuff.

"Stuff and nonsense!" she said, and blew her arrogant nostrils. "Has that nephew of mine been insufferable? Or did he give you the card I sent by him?"

The old plutocrat was equal to upholding the monologue until Miriam had recovered her composure.

"You're an ungrateful young woman to be bawling at your luck. What if I hadn't thrust my nose into your affairs? D'you think you'd have outwitted Willy, one nice young will against—" She subjected the room to an expressive snort. "To be sure, I've hounded you pretty soundly, planned to bring you down to penury and marriage." She unfrogged her sables and ensconced

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herself in a stuffy hotel chair; as if for argument.

Miriam went over to her dressing table. She combed the dark, moist hair from her face. Half leaning against the mirrored table, her brows were level over eyes lush-colored and lips whose depressions curved more ripely than of old.

"Let's not discuss my affairs," she said slowly.

"I thought you'd say as much at the end o' the ride," nodded Willoughby's aunt, unfrogging another sable fastener. The rich, uncouth voice held some humor. "My dear girl, what tyrant ever wished to override a mouse?" She was enormously good-humored, as if she had it in her power to run down the universe and wittily bag it. "Come, come, Mira; what have you to pit against a wicked old worldling with a muff full of gravel? You roofless little Arab, with the pebble of youth to hurl at the gargoyles! In the world to which you've stepped so highly, away from high hearts, p'r'aps, the worst that may come to you isn't marrying money." She emphasized her words with a nod of her head, which was topped by a toque of sable balls.

"Money," she repeated, with vast relish. "You've had your taste of it. Wasn't it nice? Wasn't it interesting enough to make you forget high hearts and low, with a Jack-in-the-game to trump your speculations? And when you lost it, didn't ignominies pile up? Wasn't your mail to-day degrading? Could I be intruding on you, now, if you had more money than I? And in marrying Willy, what would you have to fear, if I'm on your side? I'm rich, my dear; very rich." In two nods of her sable balls there was the sort of autocracy whose glittering verity holds up even the highest of hearts for a moment.

Miriam found herself stifled into silence by the fact that money had made

her forget much! She had, indeed, been cunningly intrigued by Willoughby's aunt. And in this moment she was desolate enough to glimpse the vista through which a woman of grace might walk loveless yet supreme, supreme over even so earthy a thing as passion—with money, money, money!

A pause fell like a hush over the room.

Somewhere abroad in the city, the distant blare of caroling,

"Love was born our Lord to be,
Love was born to set us free!
Very early in the morning
Love was born."

Miriam spoke with emotion. "Marriage to Willoughby? The ultimate gift—to Willoughby? Oh, God, no!" The luminous scarlet in her face was caused by love that pondered, tardily. She hid the suffused face in her arms.

Willoughby's aunt made a strange noise in her throat, and her chair was relieved of her bulk.

But she did not cross to the door.

She took from her muff a budget of letters.

"If I'd broken you with my horrible money, you'd have had the devil to pay," she vouchsafed, in a voice deflecting from her customary calm. "I'd have married you to Willy." She laid the letters on the dressing table.

Miriam's startled hands flew out to a parcel of letters from Roderick Derick, and to her!

"They're yours," nodded Willoughby's aunt.

Miriam caught up the letters. One was directed to her at Naples, another was marked *forward to Venice*, the rest were addressed to her present abode. The envelopes had been opened! And not by her!

"Quite a number of decent love letters that I've intercepted," voiced Willoughby's eccentric aunt. "I've also headed off some stalwart attempts on

the part of this young Derrick to get at you. He's been here more than once; hotel civilly rating you 'out' to his calls. Very few men are faithful in the face of foggy rebuffs. Your Roderick is one of the few."

Miriam counted the letters; seven of them, from Ricky!

"In fact," the old despot continued ponderously, "when that package of holly came—I turned rank sentimentalist. I'm a cranky old chameleon myself, but I recognize true blue when I see it. Yesterday—I'm saving the news for my nephew—I wired young Derrick to come at once to my address, and by my nephew I sent word to you to be married at my house this noon. You naturally thought Willy was to be the groom. So did he. A little too groomed for the part, I fear, my delightful nephew!" The nose glasses dangled awry.

"You're to be married to-day, willy-nilly. If it's my heir—one outcry to God from a bride doesn't always mean 'no'—Willy's waiting for you, up on the Drive." The glasses were fitted arrogantly.

Miriam had the holly in her hands. Willoughby's aunt laid a finger along her nostril, an eyebrow acock.

"If it's young Derrick, you're to speed home in time to hear the midnight chimes, and in your old hallway—I've pulled some wires to have the house you first kissed him in opened up and hung with festive gimcracks, and I've pretty well digested Roderick's letters—you're to lift your face to his under the mistletoe—— To which man will you go, child? My heir? Derrick came; I brought him along in my motor. He's below." She was frogging her sables.

Miriam was conscious of an emotion that hurled her straight into the arms of Willoughby's aunt. Her face bright white, she cried out Ricky's name.

And the old despot, in pinning up the cloudy hair more neatly with a diamond brooch from her own waved locks, displayed some knowledge of the season by quoting:

"*'Fear not; good tidings of great joy.'*"

Miriam only knew that her spirit was caroling, caroling.



ENVIRONMENT

WE met in a garden
Where the sun shone clear.
We tired of each other
Before the new year.

We met in the city
In the fog and the rain,
And we loved each other
All over again.

ANNE JELLETTE.

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The Fourth Fate

By Frances O. J. Gaither

Author of "Pleasant Houses," etc.

SURELY there is, beside the spinner of a man's life-thread and her sisters, who in turn measure its length and sever it with the blade of death, a mystic fourth Fate, who guides the course of that thread during life, weaving it into patterns. Two women had the will to guide Robeson's destiny—two women, two wills, and, I have always been sure, two destinies. For a time, they held between them, or so at least I fancy, the mantle of Robeson's fourth Fate, contending bitterly which of them should wear it. The story of that contention makes a tale scarcely pleasant.

For my part, I have a civilized man's abhorrence for lurid events. A feeling of profound distaste comes over me to this good day when I recall Robeson's bringing stained hands into Hulda's beautiful drawing-room; or remember that weird, fluttering cry of Aline's twice heard, and neither time seeming so much the voice of a woman as of some small animal; or breathe in the wind a hint of that ghastly warm Christmas when violence like clotted clouds brooded inevitably over us to break at last, fitly, against a reddened sea and sky.

But if the events repel me, the people certainly do not. There is fascination for me in considering them. Over and

over I contemplate what Robeson's life might have been but for that surprising flareback, that adventure in—shall we say atavism? If he had remained, even through that first impulse, consistently repressed, there would have been, God forgive him, no chapters of violence. I never believed he could be great; but certainly he would have achieved, as always before, quiet day succeeding quiet day in his New York house and in his winter home where the light of the stirring sea went rippling over white ceilings. Hulda, of course, interests, no, absorbs me. And even the little Aline, so negative at first, came to invite a feeling warmer than pity because, perhaps, of her brave affinity with calamity.

Hulda was tall with still eyes and a long, slow stride that made her a goddess among women. She had a vivid sort of Norse beauty. During the years of Robeson's devotion to her, we all believed that Hulda would have Robeson if ever he did the first of those "big things" which she suggested, rather too frequently toward the last, that he was capable of doing. But to state this for a fact might mislead by suggesting on my part more knowledge of their relations than I had and on Hulda's, a spirit of barter of which she was incapable. All that any of us ac-

tually knew was that after five years they seemed no nearer being married than they had in the first place. But Hulda seemed always to breathe a sort of hushed expectancy as though she felt herself in the anteroom of the grand passion.

The little Aline was nothing that Hulda was. She would never have drawn Robeson's or any other man's eyes a second time, but for her arresting history. She was thin, colorless, and, worst of all, an insistent egotist in conversation. She was a sort of cousin, from Chicago, whom Hulda, in her capable fashion, rescued by a writ of divorce from a peculiarly detestable domestic muddle and brought home until "she could get hold of herself." That process of getting hold of herself had been going on somewhere aloft in the high, narrow house for indeterminate weeks, as I recall, but the girl herself never appeared among us in Hulda's drawing-rooms until that afternoon.

I was the first to hold converse with her. She was wistful in a pale way, spoke of wanting people to like her. I looked at her navy-blue satin dress with its stupidly unbecoming neck-line and wondered why, if she cherished such a wish, she hadn't begun by taking pains with her toilet. Then she leaned toward me and spoke rapidly in an intense, persuasive way. Obviously, she expected to make me "like her" by spreading before me the array of her sordid experiences as another woman might have paraded charms.

"I have lived," she insisted.

We sat in an embrasure off the outer drawing-room which was emptied for a time. Pallieri was singing in the farther room, and every one crowded there to hear her. Only Hulda's little cousin and I were left behind, flung quite apart from the pleasant party by the tide of her strange intensity. We seemed closer indeed to the Drive veiling itself

in twilight than to the lights and color inside. I watched through the iron railing along the pavement a light-strung boat go up the Hudson, quite out of sight, and counted a dozen buses lurching past, among the neater, swifter cars, while she was telling me her story.

A clever woman guardian had married her at seventeen to a wealthy man of more than twice that age, a man who was self-indulged in dissipation past belief. She didn't veil the story. I plainly saw her white and shrinking youth set over against the will of a man who had known no check, saw her flinch, saw him angered. Her very innocence had reproached him, an irritant to his crumbling will.

"He will find me, take me again."

That was incredible. I said so.

"You have your divorce now. You're safe here with Hulda."

"He would kill me. He has said it. Hulda, too, if she opposed him. Once——" Followed a tale of violent threats. My belief strained to compass it. Strange words in such a place! "And he's here," she said, "in the city. I've seen him—twice. Once driving in Central Park—I mean we were—he didn't see us. But this morning—— We had come from shopping. I got out of the car first. He was standing across the street, watching the house, and—— You are bored," she broke off suddenly.

I started. Beyond the frame of blue hangings Hulda's party was mobile again, flowing toward us. There was a superabundance of women, as happens at teas, and that of course meant color, French blue, taupe, and autumn brown with now and then a black gown as compelling as an exclamation point. Most of those women I knew. I could have ticked off on my fingers the half-dozen who had left their husbands. And I knew the husbands. One or two had been admittedly rather cads. Another had verged on the nig-

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garded in his settlement. But I knew as I looked at the cared-for skins of Hulda's friends, skins softer in texture than the fabric of the richest gown among them, that it was hardly in reason to suppose any woman of them all had ever felt the weight of an angry man's hand.

"Not bored," I protested to Hulda's pale little cousin. "It is only that your story seems a little—unreal."

"Unreal?" she whispered. "My very life's in danger now."

Hulda stood talking to Robeson and just then he turned and looked our way. Hulda was likely telling him a chapter—or a reel—of the cousin's lurid marriage.

"They're talking of us. Let's talk about them," I suggested, mustering what gayety I could, confronted by her pallor. "Orchid is nice on Hulda, don't you think?"

"Orchid? Oh, you mean the color. Yes, I suppose so. That dress makes her very tall." She was listless, a spent rocket, now that the conversation was no longer about herself. "Hulda is rather tall anyway—for a woman."

Our talk languished. I was glad when Hulda brought Robeson over and presented him, with her usual prophetic assurance, to her cousin.

Now, you must know that, up to that day, Robeson's tranquillity was quite the most striking thing about him. It had kept him always exquisitely aloof from even those spiritual combats whereby men add to their fortunes or glory. Fortune he could of course be indifferent to, since he had the Robeson millions, but glory might well have been another matter because of Hulda. She had that delicate scorn of wealth which is achieved in perfection only by the wearers of its purple. She assumed the domain of luxury as by divine right and then yearned for other vague empires. Loving her as Robeson patently did, he may be supposed to have

wished sometimes for distinction. But, so far as I know, he had never made the least effort to win it unless you count entering his yacht *Anemone* in regattas annually, and now and then backing some morbid group of theatrical revolutionaries. Still Hulda went on introducing him as a man on the eve of doing big things.

"Big things?" her little cousin echoed. Hulda turned away. The girl looked up at Robeson. She was quite apathetic. Of course she had no manner of interest in knowing. "What sort of big things?"

"They exist only in Hulda's fancy," said Robeson.

He was apathetic, too, hardly looking at the colorless little creature in her dark frock, but instead letting his gaze follow Hulda's splendid movements. I took advantage of the chance to give Robeson my place on the cushioned window seat. Some ten minutes after—it may even have been less—I looked back. As well as though I could hear above the hum of talk, I knew what their subject was, for Robeson was no longer apathetic. His horrified face bore the very imprint of the girl's tale. His eyes, repelled, were yet fascinated, studying her; and his lean jaw dropped oddly as if in incredulity. She was telling him, of course, how savage a civilized man may become.

Commiserating him and partly, too, I fancy, to divert the girl's morbidness, I took them tea. But, as I looked in on the embrasure where they sat, my greetings died on my lips.

"Unreal?" the girl was saying with something like a moan. She caught her sleeve up and thrust her arm before Robeson. Four ugly purple splotches blotted the white flesh. "His fingers were real," she said, "quite real. He's real——"

Staring at those scars, I was overwhelmed by a lust for violence. Blood beat up into my ears, my eyes, my

wrists, suffusing my whole body with heat. I cannot explain it, of course, but I mention it because in some sort it has always made me sympathize a little with Robeson. I half turned away, but a low, swift cry caught me. It was hardly above a breath in sound. Looking back, I saw the girl shrink against Robeson. I could not see, from where I stood, the window at her elbow, but I knew as well as though I could see, that it must have framed a sudden vision of dread.

"He's found me," she whispered. "I knew he would."

Robeson put her from him gently and then leaned forward and twitched together the thick curtains. It shut me off from them, left me standing one with the murmurous, colorful harmony of Hulda's pleasant party. I was inhibited trivially, but effectively, by two cups of amber tea wherein floated golden disks of lemon. I could hardly dash them to the rug under my feet. I caught Hulda's eye. She came, took the cups, and looked at the curtains so mysteriously drawn.

"What is it, Steve?" she said to me.

"Hush. I'll see. Can't you start some music?"

But a moment and Pallieri was singing again. Every one turned that way. I waited till the last was moving toward the other room. Then I stepped into the curtained embrasure. The girl crouched on the cushions, twisting her hands, but dumb. The window was open, and the wind off the river bit into that languorous air like a thong on soft flesh. Robeson clambered back over the iron railing. Aline moved aside to let him in. Hulda stepped inside the curtains with us, crowding the tiny alcove.

"Was it he?" she asked the girl.

"Yes," said Aline, beginning to cry softly.

Hulda turned to Robeson.

"You—hurt him?"

He looked down at his hands. They were quite red.

"Not enough. I wish I had killed him," said Robeson in a thick, strange voice.

I knew that he had probably only mashed the brute's nose, still there was blood, and repulsion swept me. But the girl dropped to her knees and began to wipe Robeson's hands with her handkerchief.

"Get up, Aline. Phillip can wash his hands," said Hulda in a level, noncommittal way. "Please lower that window, Steve."

Then she put the curtains aside. The nearer room was still empty. In the other, sounded one last golden note of Pallieri's perfect song. Swiftly, rhythmically, movement began again, movement and pleasant talk. French blues wove in and out among taupes and autumn browns, with now and then a note of black for interest.

"If they are real," I said to myself, "if Hulda's friends live, murmurous, beautiful, how could I have seen the hands of Phillip Robeson, the most exquisite of all these easily natural beings, reddened with blood?"

Robeson crossed to the nearest door, following Hulda out, his hands in his pockets. A trail of dust smudged his shoulder, but he walked as always, nonchalant, lazy, beautifully unruffled. I looked through the window I was lowering. Uninterrupted, lights on motor cars flashed by like comets inevitably destined. They spangled the purple in one plane with fixed starry gleams on masts of ships anchored in the river and in buildings along the Jersey shore. A man picked himself up from the pavement and went heavily away. The girl leaned her head against the casement and looked out, too. Her face was marked with tears. Her sleeve still hung open. Her breath came pantingly.

"Mr. Robeson is wonderful, isn't he?" she said to me.

I thought of the old, old premise that women thrill to strength in a man. Would Hulda, too, think Robeson wonderful now?

Followed a fortnight in which by chance I was out of town and so heard nothing of them. The evening I got back I telephoned Hulda, and she said I might come out. She saw me in her own sitting room where there was a red fire. There was also a comfortable suggestion of activity about her open desk. I supposed she had been writing letters and idly taxed her with not answering mine. But the triviality of letters she brushed aside as she got up and came toward me, keeping sheets of paper in her hand.

"Phillip's play," she said very earnestly. "Oh, Steve, it's—it's big."

"But I didn't know Robeson had ever got around to putting a play on paper."

"He's just begun," she explained, "but I want you to hear it."

She was moved. I could see it in a dozen ways. Her voice had little quivering flames of eagerness leaping and darting across the most commonplace of her syllables. Her eyes, always so still, were restless, now demanding of me to remember that she always had believed in Robeson, now turning from me to the clock, from the clock to the door—she was expecting him. Always her fingers gripped the manuscript.

"What's it all about?" I asked.

"The title is 'Sons of Men.'"

I had a sort of falling sensation while Hulda read aloud to me the two acts Robeson had blocked in. It wasn't that the play itself aroused in me feelings of distress. It didn't. It wasn't to be taken seriously enough for that. It was rather more like a movie than drama, primal stuff, you know. It seemed as strangely unfit that Phillip Robeson should have written it as that he should have reddened his hands in a

sordid fight. But, frankly, not Robeson, much as I had liked him up to now, or his play had the power to make my heart sink as now it did. Only Hulda herself could do that. I closed my eyes, overcome with gloom.

"Well, Steve?" she asked at last.

I prayed the gods for guidance.

"Hulda," I began slowly, "tell me what you think is the great—that is, the greatest quality in Robeson's work."

"Oh, the theme," she said, without any hesitation, "heroic love."

She sat forward, panting a little, dear and desirable in her shining silver gown.

"But the story of Robeson's play—physical supremacy of the man—"

"Oh, that's just to make it simple, concrete, just for dramatic purposes. Phillip doesn't mean we are—savages! Phillip couldn't."

Have I said that I loved Hulda, too? That made it hard to sit silent under her clarified conviction. Then Robeson came.

"Hello, Steve," he said to me, "and don't let me hurry you off. I've just a moment."

"We've read it, Phillip," Hulda began, her voice so soft that my ears ached under it.

"Congratulations, old man," I brought out.

"It'll be a whale all right," said Robeson, "if I can just swing the story through the third act."

"The story," Hulda said, "isn't so great as the theme." He stared. "Some women love for greatness of soul, Phillip, women who might be repelled by—muscle. Your play mustn't let people doubt about that."

Robeson was silent, considering, perhaps, more than her words, the gentleness of her voice and the unveiled fulfillment of her eyes. It is unlikely, having waited all these years, he was in any doubt now about what Hulda meant. Looking back, I always see Robeson in

that moment first consciously confronted by his choice.

"I see what you mean," he said at last, "but, frankly, the story as written just about represented my own belief when I wrote it——"

"And now?"

"Well," he hesitated. "Wouldn't these spiritual subtleties be rather pallid fare for heroic lovers?"

Then Hulda hesitated, though of course only for words in which to prove her spiritual subtleties might be heroic. In the silence, a scream from somewhere above burned our ears. It forced attention, flaring painfully yet fluttering, too, like a torch borne running through darkness. There was a kind of whimpering helplessness pulsing through it that made it seem less the cry of a human than of some small animal, trapped.

"Aline!" cried Hulda.

I had almost forgotten the little cousin's existence. Robeson sprang to the door, up the stairs. We followed, steps clogged with horror. But it was only a nightmare after all. In the lighted upper hall the girl came toward us out of a darkened doorway. Her eyes were dimmed from sleep, and she walked softly, like some shy little animal stealing through tree trunks. She looked almost pretty, the only time I ever thought so. Her hair floated in a mist about her face and she had caught about her a gray chamber robe edged with soft white fur.

"I'm sorry," she said. "So sorry. It was a dream. I thought I heard his steps in the corridor, coming nearer and nearer——"

Robeson was breathing hard. His nostrils twitched.

"Poor little thing," he said.

"It was you I called in my dream," Aline said, looking up at him in open adoration. But she didn't seem shameless, rather splendidly simple like some legendary woman. "I called you, be-

cause I knew you wouldn't let him hurt me."

"If he ever lays a finger on you again, I'll kill him," said Robeson.

A painful flush spread up Hulda's neck and face from the rim of her silver gown. She still held Robeson's unfinished play in her hand. What a pity he ever began it! But he had begun it, and it embodied now all too definitely the big thing Hulda was determined Robeson must do. Her chin lifted.

"Shall we go back," she said, "and finish about your play?"

"I'll come, too," said the little Aline. "I couldn't sleep."

Events moved swiftly after that, because the immediacy of Aline's danger and her patent helplessness invoked a prompt protection. In exactly two weeks more, Robeson married Hulda's cousin, with her heritage of horror as a sort of fantastic *dot*, and took her at once out of range of her prowling first husband. Early autumn though it was, they sought sanctuary at Robeson's winter home. I pictured them unbearably solitary with lone caretakers at the other places along the beach, above them and below. The girl wrote now and then to Hulda, from whom I gathered next to nothing beyond the latest report on the speed of the yacht *Anemone*, which Robeson was trying out again. But I knew that girl, with her naked insistence on elemental truth, was not filling her pages to Hulda with such items. I frequently wondered what she wrote of Robeson or what Robeson, if he ever wrote, said of himself and of his excursion along the path of heroic love. But I never knew. And my concern, naturally, centered in distress about Hulda. She was a person obsessed. The play Robeson had begun was her chief thought. It was still in her possession. I knew that she read and reread it. I suspected that she wrote often to exhort Robeson con-

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cerning it. Just before Christmas she made an amazing demand of me.

"But I don't want to spend Christmas with the Robesons," I protested. "I can think of nothing so stupid. No one else has gone South yet."

Hulda only smiled and gave me a letter to read. It was not from the strange little cousin but from Robeson.

"Come and make Steve come," it said among other things. "And, by the way, if that manuscript of the play I started is lying around anywhere, you might bring it along."

Hulda drew the manuscript out of her desk. Her fingers caressed it. How long, I wondered, must her dreams follow that will-o'-the-wisp?

"You see, Steve, we have to go, that is, I do."

Robeson's house overlooked the sea. It was so near that its ceilings always reflected the glancing movement of the water. It was built, one would suppose, to frame only quiet days and a deep content, but its spacious brightness was filled instead with ghosts of shadow. Robeson's wife went stealing about with glances over her shoulder that made one's scalp prickle. Robeson laughed at her fears without ruth but without real mirth either, like a man pretending to be unconscious of an evil spirit dogging him. It was the wrong way to exorcise the evil spirit. One could see that. Hulda searched Robeson's face, waiting for the right time to mention the play which he must finish, must make great. Her eyes followed him about, ready for the least hint. It was like Hulda to wait, quiet and still.

Robeson's wife, to the gallery of horrors, furnished out of her terrible first marriage and her forebodings that its shadow would seek her out here, had added a strange, creeping terror. She made me the unwilling confidant of her unrest.

"Robeson fought for you," I reas-

sured her. One felt somehow the necessity always for simple speech and simple, compelling images in speaking to her.

"On an impulse," she said. "It surprised him. He admits that. But he loved Hulda for years. I know. Don't deny it. Maybe he wants her now. I made him write her to come and bring that play she's always writing him about—just to see," she said once surprisingly. "She's made him unhappy, pushing him to what he can't do. Still, maybe he wants her. I know he worries—about things she says to him—like that she said once about women's love. I don't know whether he doubts her or me." She shuddered. And then burst out: "I'd give a lot to know which is real, my Phillip or Hulda's!"

I told her that all these vapors should have been set at rest by her marriage to Robeson. But here on the naked beach, my words, answering her simplicity, rang insincere. Who knew so well as I how little that marriage had done to loosen the evil spell of Hulda's love for Robeson?

"Marriage!" Aline echoed me. "I suppose you'd tell me divorce freed me! Forms. I know better. I know what got me off—Phillip's fists."

She told me, first in oblique hints, then in direct speech, clearer from day to day, that which quickened my pulse although I tried to persuade myself she was a woman so deafened by concussions of violence that no other sound now found her ear. But there crept over me by degrees the nervous conviction that Robeson really would be called on to defend her again—or avenge her—and, like her, I did not in the least know whether he would do it.

"He will come," she said. "She never referred to the man who had shattered her youth by name. 'He will come as he threatened. Phillip doesn't believe it any more, or Hulda. But he'll come. You'll see.'"

I asked for motives. It was so simple to her, she stared.

"To take me."

"Ah, but for what?"

She flinched, and her eyes darkened with remembered pain. Yet fear was hardly what she seemed to feel. I cannot explain it. I've never understood her. But I was sure, if she thought of death, it was in a strange, scornful way. Perhaps she was deadened to poignancy by repeated threats, even as Robeson seemed to be deadened by the staleness of her story.

"I'd as soon be—beaten as mocked," she said.

I saw in this a hint that if it were Hulda's Robeson who was real, then the little Aline had been cruelly cheated. What could she see to love in a man of a thousand exquisite subtleties, the charming owner of the winged yacht *Anemone*?

Robeson was an urbane host, quite the Robeson Hulda and I had always known, rather quiet, slightly whimsical, wholly indolent. If he retained a memory of his flareback, it must have been as people remember dreams, not realities. But sometimes I saw him looking at the little Aline with an expression I was at a loss to read. Watching that questioning look, I was puzzled.

Ah, I wondered in his wife's fantastic phrase, which was real, her Robeson or Hulda's, the man who had got her off with his fists or the lukewarm patron of reform in drama? It was that which Robeson himself seemed not to know, or Robeson's wife, or Hulda, or I.

Christmas Eve was uncannily warm and languorous. Robeson had his servants cart in quantities of yaupon boughs filled with crimson berries, but whatever of Christmas cheer he thought to impart to the big rooms promptly flowed out again through doors and windows standing as wide open to the

warm sunshine as though it were May. We were in the great hall. Robeson, on a stepladder beside the high red sandstone chimney, was sticking up, back of the miscellaneous weapons on the wall above the wainscoting, the spurlike branches of yaupon his butler handed up to him. I lay in a long chair watching him. Hulda and Aline came in across the bright porch, trailing armloads of green bamboo vine. Hulda was splendid in a heather skirt, that swayed with her long stride, and a moss-green sweater and leather hat. Aline's dress as usual was characterless. I have forgotten it, but blue serge, I think it was. The look on her face suggested to me that their excursion had had less to do with bamboo than with sinister confidences. Evidently Robeson thought so, too.

"Hulda," he said, smiling, "which do you think the greater brute, Aline's first husband or her second?"

A bit of yaupon bough proved refractory, and a Burmese dagger came away from the wall in his hand. He sat down on top of the stepladder and stabbed at the empty air with the dagger. His wife let her armload of vines fall to the floor and came toward him. She was white and as she came nearer she kept rolling tighter and tighter a little damp ball of handkerchief. Whatever memory of her I call up, I always visualize her with that ball of handkerchief, always damp.

"Why can't you be a little merry?" Robeson asked her. "Don't you know it's merry Christmas?"

"Should you feel merry, Phillip, if I told you that I saw *him* just now, slipping back of the oleanders by the bird bath?" He did not answer, but went on making little juggling plays with the dagger as though that absorbed him. "Back of the oleanders," she repeated circumstantially, "barely half an hour ago. What should you do, Phillip, if I told you that?"

"Do, my dear? Why, urge that you have the doctor. If you told me that, meaning it, I should know that you were nervous again, unusually nervous this time, because always, when you are awake, you fear only that you may see him and never that you do."

Robeson yawned a little and slipped the dagger back through the leather thong that had held it to the wall. Then he broke the yaupon bough in two and thrust one spray in beside the dagger, adjusting it carefully and drawing his head back a little to try the effect. His wife watched him with great wet eyes and seemed about to speak again, but then she didn't after all. A moment after we heard her step, slow upon the stair. It was then I began to have for her a feeling that was warmer than pity.

"It *was* he," she said to Hulda and me that afternoon, "I know it was. But it all seems unreal to Phillip now—like that first time I told him. And I can't show him my arm this time, the scars are gone. He won't believe until—it happens." Her voice shook with some emotion not unlike exaltation. "Don't shudder. Violence isn't wholly terrible. Sometimes there is beauty in it. Maybe it's exactly what we all need. Blows might clear the air. Maybe Phillip would be stirred to finish his play, Hulda. He wrote those first two acts after——"

"Don't," said Hulda. She got up from the sand and walked away from us, down the untracked beach that furnished ever so faintly the illusion of the white Christmas for which I yearned.

Aline sat still and stared out at the sea. I dared not leave her because, unlike Robeson, I believed in her danger. I sat there by her, counting over in my mind the resources of defense that hung above the wainscoting in the great hall, and trying to remember whether I had seen three men or only two among the servants.

6—Ains.

Once, later in the afternoon, I was half convinced I saw the man myself, a swift figure, stooping and vanishing beyond the low shrubs that fringed the upper level above the sands. I told Hulda and spoke to her of telling Robeson, but she advised against it. And so I held my peace, to let events work out as they would by the grace of God, the jealousy of man, and the endless caprice of women.

Christmas Eve wore by and then Christmas Day itself, a little colder, but with nothing happening and the nerves of everybody getting tauter and tauter. Then we came to the end of the day and the beginning of early dinner. It was a strange Christmas feast with the trappings of merriment all about us and our plates heaped up almost untouched in front of us. Our host had dutifully tried, to make the walls of this room, too, gay with red and green yaupon. But there was something wrong with the motor and there were no electric lights. So the far frontiers of the big dining room were quite dark. The candles on the table served only to send fluttering shadows over the white cloth and upon our faces.

We made futile, childish attempts at merriment, sending each other Christmas wishes in a toy mail-train. It was to have moved around its little tin track by electric current, but, that failing, we shoved it from hand to hand. Hulda sent Robeson a check, one of those time-dulled checks drawn on the "bank of personal resources," but instead of "a thousand Christmas wishes" she had written "a consciousness of your own power." Robeson read it aloud and then sat biting his lip.

"So you can finish your play, Phillip," Hulda said, Aline watching her. Hulda laughed. "What a gloom! I was only trying to get a laugh."

Robeson laughed then and stood up, lifting his glass.

"To laughter," he said, "to laughter and—light!"

We drank his toast, Aline in ice water. She took no wine, needing, I thought, no stimulant so ordinary. The little stir made the unshaded candle flames quiver and the shadows over the table tremble and leap.

"I wish we did have light," said Aline, spinning an empty, long-stemmed glass. "Shadows make me nervous. I don't know why they should. I'm not a coward."

"Not a coward," repeated Robeson, laughing again.

"No, I've never been afraid of pain. You know that." She turned toward him, her eyes cavernous blanks in that light. "I never fear an actuality—as I fear what goes before, its shadow, I suppose, the uncertainty, or no, not uncertainty——" Then she laughed a little, too. "You'd hardly call it uncertain, should you, the feeling I used to have, lying awake at night listening for steps? I knew they would come, fumbling, stumbling up the stair, to my door. I knew"—she shivered—"what had to come after. But nothing ever hurt like that terrible—waiting for the shock of the inevitable." It was almost as though she were trying to make things easy for us, to say to us that whatever happened to her we should not pity her too much, for at least it would end the suspense she found unbearable. She turned to me. "Do you believe in destiny?"

I laid my fork down. I could not have swallowed a mouthful if my life had depended on it.

"Destiny?" I said stupidly.

"It is in ourselves," said Hulda.

Then I stared at the girl. Even her scorn of pain seemed to compel calamity. I nodded, yes.

"So do I. Then why wait for it to creep on us?" she cried bravely. "Why not rush out to meet it?"

She leaned forward so that her eyes were no longer veiled in shadow. For an instant I saw them wet, shining like those of a girl at her first communion, or no, much wiser than that, sadder, more like the eyes of some ancient priestess who looked on blood as a sacrament.

"Meet it?" I said. "I don't understand."

"I used to. Like this: When he came home, not himself, as they say, and I knew that there must presently be—violence—I hated the waiting so—that I used to—to hurry his anger so that——"

Robeson pushed back his chair and stood up, tall, tranquil.

"Will you excuse me, Aline?"

She looked at him. By mocking contrast there echoed in my ears the pulsing protest of other wives I had heard addressed so.

"But, dear," they would have said, those civilized women, "you've eaten scarcely anything. There's alligator pear for salad and a wonderful plum pudding and—you know how you love plum pudding." My ears thirsted for normal words like that, a bright Christmas dining room and cheerful women. But this woman, her white face broken by odd, black patches of shadow that a futurist might have painted, only gripped the edge of the table and said intensely:

"Phillip, do I bore you?"

His hand alone protested that he could not be so rude as to admit being bored, and his eyes straying toward the butler hinted to his wife a caution of delicacy. She disregarded these shades of subtlety.

"Perhaps," she went on, "you would be more interested if I talked of the present, or the future, what may happen—to-night, for instance."

"No, that would not interest me," said Robeson, measuring every syllable and bowing punctiliously, "because I

should not believe it—if you will pardon my bluntness.”

He was the old Robeson, the Robeson of Hulda's drawing-rooms, unruffled, exquisite. His wife inclined her head, and her fingers gripped the table tighter. She seemed still enough, but a sort of shiver ran through the heavy table, making the silver and crystal tinkle queerly and the champagne in our glasses rock like tiny seas before a tempest. I knew then, and I want you who read this to know, that what was to come after, mere violence, could hardly hold pain for her. It was now that she most greatly suffered, drained the lees of her poignant misery. That she who lived so close to stark reality could be spoken to so by her husband, could be bowed to! I could not look at her, but fixed my gaze on my champagne, rocking, rocking.

“Hulda,” said Robeson, “when you finish shall we talk a little of our play?”

“If you like,” said Hulda, still as ever.

“In the garden, then. We can be quiet there.”

Robeson went out, and the butler left the room a second after. Aline tried to speak. She still gripped the table, watching Hulda. But Hulda forestalled her, leaning far forward and speaking swiftly, tensely, a manner strange in her.

“Aline, you believe in hastening destiny?”

The wind off the sea was rising as night came on. It shook the windows in sudden caprice. The curtains puffed inward. The candle-flames wavered and flared, showing Hulda's still face wavering, too, shaken by I knew not what emotions. Aline waited.

“Yes,” she said.

“Can it be that you— Aline, how did this man, your other husband, know that he could find you here?”

Again that strange shiver passed through the table, the silver, the crystal.

The butler was back again, about to take away our plates and put other full ones in their places. Aline motioned him away, back to his pantry. She pushed her chair back and stood up facing Hulda.

“I wrote him where I was,” she said.

Then Hulda and I were alone. We could only stare at each other. Questions, suspicions, rippled out from Aline's admission too fast for words. There was no clock in Robeson's dining room, but I somehow felt the minutes move, moving us with them. And I had that illusion of superclarity that glows whitely at such times. I saw the little Aline demanding of life a heroic lover. I saw Hulda—

“What if Phillip should be—hurt,” whispered Hulda.

“Robeson beat the man once,” I said; “could have killed him.”

She shivered. In that luminous moment I saw, ached to see, that Hulda loved Robeson so that she braved the idea of his death rather than any unholiness in him. She was white across the Christmas table with its roses, littered plates, and overturned toy train, white and never so remote. I thought of Robeson waiting outside, willing that she should hurry out to him to talk of his ill-starred play. Hulda wished to nourish that barren thing, Hulda, who should be bearing long-limbed children with quiet eyes!

“Listen,” said Hulda to me.

“Only Aline opening her window. I heard her go upstairs.”

“What if Aline—” she began, and her words died in her throat.

It was another pebble dropped. More ripples ran out from it, widening circles of consequence. I never felt so rational, but I must have been mad.

I said: “Then Robeson would be free to marry you.”

She swayed as though I had struck her. The hand she put out to steady herself touched and upset her glass of

champagne. It poured out along the white cloth. Then, like the uneasy flurry that breathes before a squall, a casement window above us banged and shattered the silence. Running feet sounded on the stair. I ran out. Aline sped past me. The outer door closed after her flying skirts. My hand on the knob to follow her, I was halted. Hulda called me, twice, her tone sharp with menace. Back in the dining room the butler leaned against the wall. He tried to speak, but horror gagged him.

We followed him to the porch. We looked where his shaking finger pointed. The sea and the sky were drained of light, but they still held color, a Titan curtain of sullen, December red beyond the dark lawn and the wan beach. Black against that red, distinct as puppets in a shadow show, we saw writhing on the strip of beach two men locked in combat and running toward them in the wind a woman. In that instant, one man fell and lay, a mere huddled shadow on the pale sand; and the other turned to meet the woman.

Which was he? Ah, Aline—

I leaped down the steps, stumbled, rose again, and ran. Running, I saw Aline's skirts blow about her in the wind and her hands lift as in pleading; saw the man catch her two wrists with one hand and raise his other arm; saw it descend on her once, and again, and again; saw her crumple under the blows. Nearer I heard her cry, as once before, not a single scream, but a little piteous wail with an overtone of moaning. The wind brought words.

"Yours, only yours. How can you doubt it now! I never loved him. And you still love me. Your anger tells me." He struck her again. Her voice rose exultantly. "I had to know if you kill me for it. I knew that letter must bring me suffering, but I had to write it, had to know you love me."

Then suddenly I stumbled again.

My very feet were shocked. The man was lifting the woman. His hands were perhaps red with the blood of that other lying there, unheeded, on the sand. Indubitably they were violent hands, still hot from wreaking jealous rage upon her quivering body—but she let them draw her to him. To my civilized mind it was monstrous. I stood transfixed as the dark shapes of the man and the woman melted into one shape against the red of sea and sky. The woman's skirts, wind-whipped, seemed to bind them close. I looked away, half afraid of revelation, but I could not close my ears. That colloquy on the beach throbbed on, the woman's voice mounting to painful heights of exaltation, the man's breaking in, hoarse, dominant.

"Ah, don't let me mention him!" she cried. "Make me do what you like!"

Drawn to look again I saw the figure prone on the sand stir, lift, stand swaying a moment, and then, with head dropped forward on his breast, walk quite away, leaving Aline in the stronger man's arms. Some one stole beside me, quiet on the sod. Hulda took the lapels of my coat in her hands and drew my face near, straining to read it in the dusk. She tried to speak, but a sob strangled her.

"Men——" she began.

Far from understanding though I was, I answered her.

"Men differ, Hulda. Are women all alike?"

She pondered that a moment, standing close. Then the man on the beach spoke again, hoarse, passionate.

"You've nearly driven me mad talking of him—then when he said you wanted *him*, said you'd sent for him, and you couldn't deny it——"

It was Robeson's voice, altered oddly, but his. I knew it now by the shudder that wrenched Hulda's body. Hulda was immeasurably above this violence,

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Hulda, who must love for greatness of soul, who could endure, for the beloved, death itself rather than any unholiness. But she was quiet as always, hearing Aline thrill to her happiness.

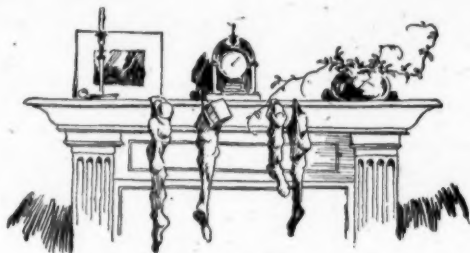
"How you love me!" said Aline.

Then that strange, strident note in

Robeson's voice broke huskily, and he repeated over and over with hot tenderness:

"Little Aline! Mine!"

Hulda's little cousin had won the mystic mantle, but Hulda no longer wanted it.



CHRISTMAS SONG

ONCE, dear, beneath the Christmas tree,
You gave a wonder gift to me.
Your lips and cheeks were warmly red,
And, high above your little head,
The branches of the mistletoe
Swung, very gently, to and fro.

Your hands touched mine, your fingers clung,
And all the world seemed still—and young;
The joyous carols on the air
Became as soft as any prayer;
And oh, you raised your face to me,
Beneath the fragrant Christmas tree!

I think the earth stopped turning then,
And kings and queens and mice and men
In all the countries, near and far,
In every place where people are,
Grew quiet. 'Neath your silken gown
I heard your heart throb up—and down.

I kissed your hands, I kissed your eyes,
All lit with gladness and surprise;
And then I kissed your lips, and you
Were like a fairy tale come true,
For, then, you gave a gift to me—
Your heart, beneath the Christmas tree!

MARGARET E. SANGSTER.



"Hello, Marcia!"

By Meade Minnigerode

Author of "The Big Year"

WHAT HAPPENED IN PREVIOUS CHAPTERS.

Marcia Crane has married Philip Blagden, and they are living, as are their parents, in the smart suburb of Greenchester. When Marcia married Philip she did not greatly love him, but she had listened to her mother analyze the situation one day: Marcia's father was the editor of the *Greenchester Weekly Mirror*; Eliza Crane, Marcia's mother, had married him for sentimental reasons, and neither of them had had or would ever have any money; then there was Adele, Marcia's flapper sister, who needed to be projected on society, and Loomis, the small brother for whom the Cranes themselves couldn't hope to do much in the future. For herself, Marcia didn't care, but she had to admit that by marrying Philip, heir to the Blagden fortune, she could do a great deal for her helpless family. The older Blagdons encouraged and then blessed their son and "little Marcia Crane." With difficulty, the Crane family concealed their relief at the union. All Greenchester was pleased, also—all except Mary Ransom, who had wanted Philip herself. Since she couldn't get him, she recalled to Marcia Crane her affair with Duncan White. Marcia had been engaged to him one summer, and when he left her to go to war they had made an agreement that at noon every day Marcia was to say "Hello, Duncan!" and at five o'clock every day—to allow for the difference in time between France and the States—Duncan was to say, "Hello, Marcia!" No one had known of the engagement, and only Mary Ransom had guessed it. And one day, in swimming, long after, she had heard Marcia say at twelve o'clock: "Hello, Duncan!" But one day, some one in Greenchester's younger set had told Marcia casually that Duncan White was dead, that he had been reported missing in France. And after that nothing had mattered. So she had married Philip. But after the honeymoon, when they had settled down in their little home, all Greenchester realized that the Cranes viewed Marcia's marriage as the coming into a sort of Promised Land for them—and Philip's mother gradually became aware of her son's unhappiness. Philip himself had not been able to decide what was lacking in his new life—there was nothing for which he could reproach Marcia and he had no desire to seclude her from her family—but there were limits to his patience. He was glad, therefore, to yield to his father's suggestion that Marcia and he go abroad for the winter. It was at their farewell party that Marcia's world seemed to crash about her. One of their guests read aloud to the chattering crowd an item from the *Mirror* about a man in a hospital in Honolulu who had lost his memory, who, every day, said "Hello" to some girl, though he did not remember anything about her. The girl's name was not given, but Marcia was certain that the man was Duncan White, even while she prayed it might not be. Without divulging anything, she tactfully wheedled Philip into going to Honolulu instead of Europe—which he eagerly agreed to do. Mary Ransom, meanwhile, sent an anonymous letter to Roscoe Crane telling him that she felt sure the man in Honolulu was Duncan White and urging him to use the information in attempting to restore the unfortunate man's memory. In Honolulu, Marcia went to the hospital, where the doctor allowed her to see his patient. She recognized him at once as Duncan White. But, in her fear and irresolution, she gasped: "I don't know that man!"

CHAPTER IX.

THE next day Philip came bustling into their sitting room, littered with the confusion of Marcia's shopping—mostly *hula hula* dolls apparently, there were certainly enough of them around in their little

straw skirts and yellow garlands—and brandished two tickets in front of her.

"Pack up your troubles in your old kit bag—light marching order," he told her. "We're going to the volcano. The Mauna Kea sails at noon. Take a sweater and the film-pack camera."

Marcia's recollections of that hurried trip were all very confused afterward. The details of it had simply followed on each other's heels like the unrelated incidents of a dream, and she had had to read it all up in a guidebook later in order to talk intelligently about it.

First there had been a steamer, and she had been made to sit in the bow and watch the flying fish. They had had a very rough time of it, too, in the squally passages between the islands, and they had all gotten very wet from the spray. It seemed afterward that they had "had a bully time." Down in the steerage there had been a great many sheep, all trussed up. How she had become aware of that fact she did not remember. Also they had eaten some horrible stuff called *poi* at dinner.

"Oh, you must try it," Philip insisted. "Try everything once. It tastes like a mixture of soap and sherry. You eat it with your fingers—this seems to be 'two-finger' *poi*—don't make faces at it—it's a dish for kings, Hawaiian kings!"

Lanai had gone by, brown and goat infested, and Molokai, and the cloudy heights of Haleakala towering over Maui. Somewhere in there, there had been an amazing sunset, a riotously flamboyant outpouring of crimsons and violets and yellows against the raucous green of the shore, in the midst of which a lamp had been lit in the sky which was the evening star. For a few minutes the sea was purple, and then the night had engulfed them, ablaze with Pacific constellations twinkling at each other like the lights of city streets on a frosty evening.

And then later on they had gone ashore some place in the dark, Lahaina perhaps, or more probably Makana, just for the ride through the surf in the open boat, with the tall figure of the helmsman standing at the stern, watching for the big rollers.

"Come on," Philip had suggested. "Let's go and shoot the chutes in the rowboat; what do you say, Marcia? The steamer can't go in any closer on account of the squalls that come down from Haleakala. It's quite a tricky landing, they wait for a big one and then go zooming into the dock at right angles, and coming out again it's a good deal of a gamble because you can't see them coming. Watch until she comes up on a wave and then step in; remember, she'll go down with you like an elevator—look out for your hand—"

And then the following morning a rocky coast to starboard punctuated with waterfalls, and Hilo, with lunch in a funny, old hotel run by a Greek. It reminded Marcia of a song Dicky Stark was fond of singing in deep swinging minors:

Johnnie's gone,
What shall I do?
Oh-aye, oh-aye—
Johnnie's gone,
And I'll go too—
John's gone to Hilo—

Later on that day they rode for miles in an automobile—it had been stage-coaches before, Philip complained, and much more fun—between banana trees, and came finally to the Mountain House across a waste of lava under a rainy sky. Down below, glowing crimson against the flying mist from the sea, was a great steaming caldron which seemed to be what they had come to see.

"There she is!" said Philip. "That's *Halemau mau*, The House of Everlasting Fire, where the goddess Pele lives. They haven't any word for everlasting so they say *mau mau*—fire fire! Remember 'The Bird of Paradise' and the scene where Laurette Taylor jumped into Kilauea? It certainly gives you the willies when you go and stand at the edge of it and think of the days when they used to throw people in!"

Far into the night they had sat on

the lava rocks, screening their faces against the scorching heat, watching the restless turmoil, the seething fountains of fire, and the slow-spreading flows of copper-colored liquid—feeling the tremors of invisible explosions, listening to the cries of sea birds battling their way against the high-flung, acrid, sulphur fumes.

How quickly would death follow if you did jump into the crater, as in the old days of the human sacrifices to Pele, Marcia was thinking. Right into the center of the heaving mass, where the glasslike filaments of the spun lava were being formed—Pele's hair—while the goddess, whirled through her fiery dances, awaiting the renewal of the ancient rites—

On the way back to Oahu it was very rough, and there was a man in the lounge, who had stayed over from the preceding steamer, who insisted on singing most of the evening:

"Ohhow—I want yuh—
Dearrold—pal—uv—mah-ine——"

Halemau mau, The House of Everlasting Fire!

Throughout that journey to the southernmost island, during the days which followed their return while they were waiting for the steamer which was to take them away from Honolulu, the mansion of Marcia's soul was a House of Everlasting Fire, the unappeasable fire of her bitter self-reproach.

"I'm sorry, I don't know that man, Doctor——"

The terrible words were blazed across the blackness of her sleepless nights, seared into the beauty of every sunlit hour; they thundered like a pitiless surf against the shore of her memory.

In one unthinking moment of panic-stricken self-preservation, before she had fled from the presence of that questioning doctor who would have detained her, she had denied Duncan

White, as once upon a time, thrice before the cock crew, Peter had denied his Lord. And Peter had gone forth and wept bitterly. Yes, Marcia could understand that, the bottomless depths of self-abasement, filled with consuming shame.

She had gone shopping in the hour that had followed, shopping for *hula hula* dolls and *koa* wood bowls, dicker-ing over a bargain counter. But all the while her stumbling footsteps had led her deeper and deeper into the burning shadows of her House of Everlasting Fire——

Of course she must do something. Marcia had understood that before she had gone a block from Kahilihani Street that day. Mary Ransom had been right. Whatever the consequences to him or to any one else, it was utterly impossible to turn aside from Duncan White, to suppress the facts of his identity. Justified or not, such a thing was simply murder.

But difficult as it had been before, how much more so was it now to step forward and acknowledge him. Marcia felt that she could never stand before that doctor again and tell him the truth, tell him that she had lied to him, that she had been afraid. He would despise her. And it would have to be the whole truth now, cried out all at once before Doctor Foster, and before Duncan, and before Philip, in an hour thrust upon her, helplessly unprepared and unrehearsed.

There must be another way—a way to perform her duty to Duncan without revealing that moment of despairing weakness to the doctor, that *stranger*, without precipitating the final explanation with Philip, the ultimate confrontation with Duncan.

It was on the evening before they were to sail that the only possible way—a pitifully distasteful way which came as the last solution to her harried

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thoughts—drove her to seek what seemed to her another favor from Philip.

They were down at Waikiki, under a jeweled sky, taking their farewell of the bay.

"Philip," she said to him suddenly. "Do you remember at our party in Greenchester last November, Dicky Stark read an article that father had quoted in the *Mirror* about a man who had lost his memory?"

"Why, yes, vaguely," he replied. "Something about five o'clock, wasn't it, and saying 'Hello' to his girl—oh, by jinks, the man was here in Honolulu, come to think of it, wasn't he?"

"Yes," Marcia continued. After all, this was not much easier than it would have been to face the doctor and be done with it. "I've—I've made inquiries about him—"

"That's a thoughtful girl—"

"I was so struck by the story at the time, I—I thought I'd ask."

"What did you find out?"

"He's here, in a private sanitarium, and he's lost his memory entirely, and there's absolutely no way—no way of finding out who he is, or who he belongs to."

"To whom he belongs, you mean," Philip teased her. "Gosh, that's tough luck, isn't it? It's almost like being blind. His mind is blind. I wonder what's become of his girl."

"I—I don't know," Marcia hurried on. "Philip, I was wondering—listen, couldn't we do something?"

"How do you mean?"

"I don't imagine they are able to do very much for him here, treatment and everything, I mean, and of course the doctor must be keeping him at his own expense and probably can't afford to have him taken anywhere."

"No, I suppose not. I don't know what you have to do in a case like that—something like shell shock perhaps."

"Well, couldn't we have him sent

home to America, and looked after properly somewhere?" There, it was done!

"By gosh!" Philip exclaimed. "That's an idea. We could, couldn't we? There's a hospital in Washington where they make a specialty of such things, I think. It's the big army hospital, what's it called—oh, shucks—Walter something or other—oh, yes, Walter Reed. We could have him sent there. Let's do that, what do you say, Marcia?"

"That's just what I wanted to do," she explained. "Only I didn't know about the Walter Reed Hospital. That would be just the place, wouldn't it?"

"Sure, they might be able to fix him right up. Well, I'd better see about it at once if we're sailing to-morrow noon."

"Oh, please, Philip," she stopped him. "Let me do it. I'll have plenty of time to arrange it in the morning. I'm all packed. I want to do it out of my own money, please, only I—I thought I'd ask you first about it, since—since it's your money really—"

"My dear girl," he smiled at her. "You little goosie! It's yours to do anything with you want to, you know that—and everything I have is yours, you know that, too, don't you?"

"Yes, Philip—thank you—"

"Good grief, woman, don't thank me!" he laughed. "Don't I love you more than everything else in the world?"

"Yes, Philip—"

"And don't you love me more than everything else in the world? What's that—I can't hear you!"

"Y-yes, Philip—"

"Very well then—kiss me!"

"Yes, Philip—"

The next day Marcia found herself once more in that cool, white-walled room, facing the doctor and a girl who

had been standing beside his desk reading a letter.

"My head nurse," he said, nodding at the girl, and waited for Marcia to speak. So she had come back, he was thinking to himself. He had expected that she would, at least he had hoped that she would. Of course he had been watching outgoing passenger lists in case—

"What is it you wish to say this morning?" he asked somewhat abruptly. He was not in a very patient mood, apparently, at the moment.

Marcia expounded her business, clearly and briefly. She was not afraid now. In a few minutes it would be all arranged, and then she must leave for the steamer, and she would never have to see this Doctor Foster again.

"Mr. Blagden and I want to send this man back to America," she told him. "To the Walter Reed Hospital in Washington, you know—if you will simply communicate with my husband's office in New York they will arrange for all expenses."

It was all perfectly simple, and no mention even of Greenchester.

"Oh, so that was it," the doctor said to himself. "She wanted to take the man away—well, well—"

He glanced at Miss Sims, and then turned to Marcia again.

"Your offer is a very generous one, I'm sure," he said slowly. "I should be very glad to take advantage of it for my patient's sake. Unfortunately it is quite impossible for me to do so."

"Quite impossible!" Marcia exclaimed. She had not even considered the likelihood of his making any objection to her plan. "Why, what do you mean? If you want references—"

"You don't understand," Doctor Foster said very gravely. "It's not a matter of references. It is impossible for me to send the man in question anywhere."

"Oh, but what do you mean? Surely

you don't intend to insist on his staying here?"

"No—I can't even do that."

"You can't—you mean that—oh, what is it, what is it?" Marcia cried.

"The man is not here—he disappeared from this house during the night."

CHAPTER X.

The cablegram from Honolulu which had so perturbed Roscoe Crane had said very much the same thing.

Patient disappeared no trace Foster.

Of course it had taken all of the self-restraint that Mary Ransom could muster to keep from going at once to the office of the *Greenchester Weekly Mirror* to find out what this "urgent and startling news" of which she had been advised might be. But she satisfied herself finally with writing a second letter in which she instructed Roscoe Crane to publish the news in question anonymously in the *Mirror*, in the form of an article, and then to do nothing more until he received further advices.

As a result of which the following week that excellent newspaper set out to assist the cause of kindly charity with a half column headed:

MYSTERY MAN MISSING FROM HONOLULU HOME

and conveying the information that it was now reported "on reliable authority" that the "mysterious stranger," whose "sad and curious case" had already been mentioned in those pages, had now suddenly disappeared from "the confines of the island home which sheltered his misfortune," and that "no clew as to the wanderer's whereabouts" had yet been found. He was, the article went on to say, thought to have gone inland, or to have "put out to sea," either to one of the "outer islands," or even possibly "to the mainland."

Of course, that last statement was a gratuitous invention on Roscoe Crane's part, but it seemed safe to assume such a thought, considering the topographical features of the "island home" concerned; and the desire to theorize on the disappearance coincided too closely to be neglected with the lack of a paragraph with which to fill out the column.

Incidentally, just as the Campanile was erected to the strain of chanting choirs, so this article was put forth to the accompaniment of much spasmodic flute playing.

Mary Ransom was furious.

That the man out there was Duncan White she did not doubt for a moment, and she was also thoroughly convinced that Marcia had been engaged to him, or at least so very nearly so as to make it all the same. If the coincidence of the greetings had not been sufficient—and she had long since grasped the significance of the discrepancy in time, without the aid of flutes or fiction—then the things which she had surprised in Marcia's voice, and in the changing expressions of her face, that evening when Dicky Stark had read the first article in the *Mirror*, were enough to assure her of it.

Even if this man were not Duncan White after all—and, of course, the name of the girl had not been given in that article—still Marcia Crane had been in love with Duncan White, and she had very probably been engaged to him. At all events Marcia Blagden was still in love with Duncan White.

"That's as plain as the nose on her little angel's face!" Mary Ransom remarked to herself.

On the other hand, in marrying Philip Blagden, Marcia Crane had brought about a situation which had rendered possible the launching of that laugh at her own expense which Mary Ransom had never forgotten, and which she would never forgive.

Were Duncan White to return, as after all many another similarly missing man *had* returned, then the knowledge of the former circumstances would have supplied her with a weapon of retaliation against the latter—either in the relishing of Marcia's discomfiture when Philip discovered the bargain-counter, shop-worn character of his wife's affection, or, if necessary, in the relentless guiding of Philip through her own efforts to that discovery.

And now Duncan White—this man—had disappeared again! Her weapon remained unbalanced and unwieldable in Mary Ransom's hand, her retaliation was gone with him to "one of the outer islands," or "even possibly to the mainland."

For of course Mary Ransom had no intention of involving herself in any direct passage of arms with Marcia on the subject, and still less with Philip. Without the living, and fully *conscious* presence of Duncan White at hand to corroborate her suspicions quite spontaneously on his own behalf, Mary Ransom was not fool enough to give expression to them,—or to put herself in the position of seeming to slander Caesar's wife.

"Our dear, sweet, little Marcia can do no wrong, God bless her——"

No. This man must be found.

Greenchester in general was of the same opinion, on purely romantic grounds.

"Can't let this bird wander off like that," said Dicky Stark. "He must be somebody's darling. Somewhere a voice is calling, calling for him, somewhere a heart is sighing, sighing——"

"Oh, shut up!" they all laughed at him, while Marcia looked at the fire in the Greenchester Club living room where they were having tea, and tried not to listen. "Say it with flowers!"

"All right, all right," Richard

apologized. "But this Hawaiian Man of the Iron Mask has got to be found."

"You tell them, Stark, old scout," grinned Archie Craig. "And then if he isn't found you can always blame it on the administration."

"Yes, may I not—"

"Anyway he's probably simply parked somewhere on one of the outer islands."

"I'll bet he isn't, as a matter of fact," Adele put in. She had not been invited to this particular party, but she seemed to be there just the same. "If he were anywhere in the islands they'd have found him. They'd have raised the well-known hue and cry and brought him in, alive or dead—you know what I mean, like the Canadian Mounted Police."

"Yes, I guess you're right," Mildred Stark agreed with her. "He probably got aboard a boat for the mainland your father talks about in his article."

"You have to grant it to father," smiled Adele. "He's quite the old boy at putting nothing and nothing together, isn't he? A man disappears on the shore of an island. Aha, says pa, he's either gone inland or else out to sea! That's pulling down the high ones, I tell you."

"What do you think, Marcia?" asked Dorothy Craig. "You were out there. Did you hear anything about it?"

"No—I've already told you—"

"Well, do you think a man could disappear in Honolulu that way and not be found almost at once?"

These perfectly futile discussions nearly drove Marcia to distraction. To be obliged to chatter like this about it, she who cared so vitally, with all these well-meaning people who were really not in the least interested, was a torture.

"Oh, I don't know," she replied wearily. "I don't think he could, no, as I've told you before. It's a very small place after all. The whole island's

about as big as a minute. I expect he got on a boat and went to San Francisco."

"Or to Japan," Dicky Stark added.

"Or to Australia," suggested Adele.

"Yes, or to Japan, or to Australia," Marcia repeated. "Or wherever ships go from Honolulu. There's a considerable choice of destinations after all. I guess talking about it won't find him."

"There, take that!" Dorothy Craig said to Richard as Marcia went off to the writing room, arguing with Adele about going to the village with her.

"I tell you I'm not going in yet," they heard her say. "Don't nag so, Adele!"

"Marcia's terribly peevish, it seems to me, since she got back," Richard complained. "And, my dears, have you noticed how she's sitting on her family these days?"

"I don't blame her," said Archie. "She ought to have done it long ago."

"Well, that may all be," insisted Richard. "But in the last few weeks she's done nothing but bite at people like a snapping turtle. She's got something on her mind."

"That's more than you have, anyway," Dorothy Craig assured him, which direct proof of interest in his person on her part, negative though it might be, seemed to please Dicky Stark more perhaps than it annoyed him.

"Well, well," he observed airily. "We *are* getting along splendidly, aren't we?"

Marcia finally managed to get rid of Adele for a while, flung herself into a seat at one of the writing desks, and sat staring at the blotter in front of her. It seemed to her that if she had had to listen to another sentence of this endless bickering about the man in Honolulu she would have gone out of her head. She wanted to scream, to smash and tear things and throw the

pieces in every direction, to dig her fingers into something that would rip and fall apart in little bits for her to stamp on, to scratch and gouge and—Oh!

Marcia pounded noiselessly with her clenched hands on the desk, and rocked back and forth in her chair in a choking fury. What was going to be the end of all this?

She pressed her cold fingers over her eyes and remained motionless then for a long time, in a terrible stillness, galvanic with suppressed emotions. It was March now, nearly two months had passed since that morning in Honolulu, and the burden of her anxious remorse weighed down upon her soul as unbearably still as it had in those first few unbelievable moments.

Where was Duncan White, what had become of him—why had she denied him, at five o'clock in the garden on Kahilihani Street—why had she not told Philip the truth, once and for all?

A hundred times a day now she sprang from her chair and paced the room, ready to go to him and fling the whole miserable affair down before him, and spread it all out for him to look at, the ugly, misshapen, naked truth—and a hundred times a day her hand faltered at the door, her resolve failed her, her footsteps turned aside and dragged her away from the inevitable anger and scorn which must come into his eyes at her confession, and from the pain in them which she must face.

"I don't want to hurt him!" she said despairingly. "I was the only one who was to suffer when I married him——"

As for the others in the next room, and their merciless questionings, she had foreseen something of the sort—although not her father's blundering revival of the subject—when she had begged Philip not to say anything to any one about their plan which had gone astray.

"Let's not tell any one, Philip," she had suggested. "It would have been very—very nice if we could have taken the man home and all that, but let's not tell everybody about it—I'd rather not."

But if she had, there would have been little enough to tell.

"He disappeared from this house during the night," Doctor Foster had said, and a long, long time afterward as it had seemed to Marcia she had found herself staring at a letter which the nurse must have given to her, the letter the nurse had been reading when she first came into the room. A letter in Duncan White's handwriting, with the boldly crossed t's and the long, adventurous g's that she knew so well.

It said:

DEAR DOCTOR FOSTER: When you get this I'll be gone. I've got it all arranged, and I don't want you to waste any time trying to find me.

I can't ever thank you for all you've done for me, and I simply can't stay here any longer, a burden to you. I never thought of it until the other day—didn't realize what it meant, my being here this way—or I'd have gone before.

Thank you from the bottom of my heart, and please don't worry about me. I'll be all right. Please say good-by to Miss Sims for me, and tell her I'll never forget how kind she has been, and that I hope she'll enjoy her vacation.

And give my love to little Kinau, and tell her I hope to get to heaven some day, even though I haven't any name. Good-by.

And then, of course, the blank space where the name should have been.

"And that's all we know," Doctor Foster had told her after a while. "He seems to have gotten up during the night and slipped out. The bed had not been slept in. He took nothing except the clothes he wore, a package of cigarettes, his toothbrush and some matches."

"But something must be done to find him," Marcia insisted. "You mustn't let him go like that!"

"You forget, I don't even know his

name," the doctor reminded her coldly. "I've notified the authorities, of course, but the chances are he will have shipped on a vessel before we can get our hands on him."

"You must stop him!" Marcia insisted again.

"Even if we were to find him," the doctor told her, "I have no jurisdiction over him. He was simply my guest! He is in perfectly good health."

"It was my fault," the nurse kept saying. "All my fault. I'll never forgive myself. It was I who told him how expensive it was here and everything. He was asking me about it and I never thought. And then he wanted to know who was paying for him. He must have had it on his mind for several days."

She seemed terribly upset over it, this girl—a fine-looking girl, Marcia remembered, with splendid eyes and a cloud of yellow hair just like her own. Marcia had felt like telling her not to worry so about it. If the nurse had cause for self-reproach then how must she blame herself! Marcia grew quite angry at her for making such a fuss—what did it matter what the nurse had done in the face of what she herself had not done.

"I'm very sorry, Mrs. Blagden," the doctor said finally. "If—if your offer had only come a few days sooner."

"Yes," Marcia answered hastily. "It's—it's too late now."

"Yes," the doctor repeated gravely. "It's too late now, as you say."

He must have motioned the nurse out of the room, because in a moment they were alone. And then an awful thing had happened. Marcia shuddered now every time she thought of it.

"Mrs. Blagden," the doctor said to her very slowly. "I am a doctor. It is my task to heal and make whole, not to judge. Why didn't you tell me the

truth the other day? You could have trusted me."

He had known, he had known all the time, and she had been more afraid of telling him perhaps than any one else! "Oh—oh!" she gasped. "Don't look at me like that!"

Marcia did not remember how she managed to get away from Kahilihani Street. She did not know what she had said to the doctor finally—something about an address, her husband's office in New York, in case— Yes, and she had offered him some money, a contribution for his hospital. He had refused it. He must have thought that she was bribing him in some way.

"It was for him," she cried. "In case he comes back!"

"He will never come back," Doctor Foster replied.

"Oh, but if he did—why are you so sure?—if he did, you could tell him some one was—was paying for him," Marcia pleaded.

"Do you think he would accept it?" the doctor asked her. "From you?"

"Oh—you're a doctor, but you're—you're judging me!" Those were the last words she said to him.

The next thing she remembered, she was in her stateroom on the steamer, and Philip was exclaiming that it was too bad—and didn't she want to come up on deck for a last look at Honolulu?

Pearl Harbor, Tantalus, the Punch-bowl, the heights of the Pali, Waikiki, Diamond Head, Koko Head, Makapuu Point—one by one they passed and faded, until the island had returned into the distant haze whence it came, imprisoned in the embrace of many lonely waters.

And now what was to be the end of all this?

For herself it would have been a relief to have it all out, to tell it in Gath, to proclaim it from every housetop in Greenchester—but how it would hurt

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Philip! Marcia did not want to hurt him. Out there in Honolulu it had been fear that had kept her silent—she knew that now—fear of the actual physical process of uttering the necessary words. Now it was the dread of the effect which those words would have on Philip.

"If only I didn't like him so much!" she kept saying to herself.

But whatever the end of it all, she must find Duncan White. The wrong committed against Philip was as nothing, after all, compared to the wrong done to Duncan White. In acting a falsehood before Philip she was merely allowing him to believe in the truth of something which he greatly desired, but in lying about Duncan White it was as though she had pushed a drowning man's eagerly clutching fingers away from a storm-tossed raft.

And so under whatever moving stars, upon the face of whatever turbulent waters, in the midst of whatever busy market places Duncan White sought his freedom, he must be found. She would devote every moment of her time, every energy of her mind to this. She had pictures of him, there were detective agencies all over the world, the authorities of two hemispheres could be set in motion to bring a criminal to justice. In this case let them bring justice to an innocent man.

Somewhere, some day, in a lonely room, or in a crowded place, on a ship, or on a mountaintop, or in a city street, under a desert sun, or tramping through snow-laden forests, at five o'clock, the man would be found who always said "Hello, Marcia."

CHAPTER XI.

"Hello, Marcia!" said a sudden voice at her elbow, and Marcia nearly jumped out of her chair. It was Adele. "Say, for the love of Pete, aren't you going in pretty soon? How

long have I got to hang around here waiting for you?"

"Yes, I'm going in—in a minute."

"In a minute!" exclaimed Adele.

"Say, what's the big idea? It's getting late, the others have all gone."

"Couldn't you get any one to take you in?" Marcia smiled.

"No—why should I when you're here? I didn't try."

"Oh, of course, pardon me——" Adele was never very good at irony directed against herself.

"Well, how about it?" she went on. "Let's give her the gas—you know I have to help mother get supper. Guess you've forgotten all that now with your servants."

"I seem to be reminded of it fairly frequently," Marcia said rather shortly. Her sister exasperated her so at times. "You shouldn't have come if it's going to make you late at home, Adele. You weren't asked in the first place, were you?"

"What of it?" Adele snapped back at her. "If Mildred Stark wants to give a private party she'd better hire a hall. I guess I've a perfect right to be here."

"Oh, don't be silly—all I mean is you didn't have to come, and you shouldn't have stayed so long if you have something to do at home."

"Yes, that's all very fine for you to say," Adele remarked. "You, with your car, and your servants, and all the rest of it, you should worry. But when I try to have a little fun now and then you——"

"Adele!"

"Oh, I've got your number. Now that you're married to Philip, and spend your days gallivanting around and hitting the high spots all the time, you can't be bothered with your own sister any more."

"Why, Adele!" Marcia remonstrated. "You know I only married

him to make things easier for all of you. I sacrificed a good many——"

"Oh, can the heroine blurb," Adele advised her. "Fat lot you sacrificed except the pleasure of washing your own dishes, and shining your own shoes. To hear you talk you might think that marrying Philip was like going to the electric chair. I guess your hair isn't turning gray over it, old dear!"

"Do you mean to say——"

"Yes, I mean to say a lot of things. You're so tremendously up-stage since you got back—every one's noticed it. But you can't get away with that with me, and the sooner you find parking space in your mind for that fact the better. You're in pretty soft, you are, and you can just come across while the coming's good!"

"Come across—pretty soft—you think I'm——" Marcia faltered. Adele had never talked to her like this before.

"You heard me the first time," the latter went on. "Pretty soft! Nix on the sob stuff, cutie—why, you aren't even thinking of having a baby, are you?"

"Adele!"

Marcia stood for such a long time staring at Adele, her white face set and expressionless, her big, round eyes absolutely vacant, that her sister became very frightened. She had seen Marcia terribly angry like that once before, when they were little girls, and the subsequent explosion of her feelings had nearly strangled her physically.

"Oh, come on, Marcia," she said to her finally with a little half-hearted laugh. "I didn't mean to get your goat—I guess it's none of my business whether you have any children or not—come on, let's go home."

"What? Oh, yes." Marcia drew her furs around her shoulders and turned to the door. "We'll go home now," she said, in a very still, small voice.

Marcia was driving herself, and she shot away from the club entrance and through the gates without another word, her two hands on the big steering wheel, her gaze fixed on the thread of slushy road before her. Every now and then her imperious Klaxon cut impatiently into the night, once, and once again, and yet again, a little louder each time, challenging the shadows with its arrogant exclamation, but she did not slow down once.

"Good grief!" Adele exclaimed at one of the turns. "Do you always drive like this? Have a heart!" But Marcia did not seem to have heard her.

Marcia had not heard anything really since Adele had made that blistering remark at the club. She was driving perfectly mechanically, doing all the proper things as emergency required instinctively, and without any realization of the speed at which she was traveling.

Her whole consciousness was concentrated on just one thing, one bitterly heartbreaking discovery which had been forced upon her. They had no conception of what she had done for them, her sacrifice meant absolutely nothing to them, it was not even a sacrifice in their eyes. Her own sister was jealous of her, and was capable of words in which to make light of what she had done, and put forward her claims for a share of the spoils.

"Nix on the sob stuff, cutie——"

And what Adele said her mother must be thinking, and Loomis, and even her father—although he, poor soul, seldom thought about anything at all beyond his precious crimes—because the younger daughter had always been the spokesman for the family attitudes. It had always been Adele who came out pat in so many spadelike words with something they had all been thinking but had not dared express. She would not have dared say such things herself,

if she had not already heard them hinted at.

Marcia was horrified. In the midst of all her great trouble this one little, sordid, despicable thing stung her beyond endurance, the fatal straw to break the backbone of her self-restraint, and her anger arose within her, white and savage, and blinded her.

She drew up at the front gate of the "little whited sepulcher," and followed Adele up the path, leaving the engine churning away and the searchlights turned on.

"Are you coming in?" asked Adele. She had not expected her to.

"Yes, I'm coming in," Marcia told her. "Any objection?"

They were all there, in that dreadful living room—her mother, surrounded by untidy scraps of material which she was attempting to piece together for some deceptive purpose or other, and Loomis, straining his eyes over a magazine, and of course her father in his corner with the inevitable book.

"Hello, there, Sis!" Loomis exclaimed at once. "She's come to take us to supper—ma, you were saying that——"

"Keep still, Loomis!"

"Are we going to supper with you?" he insisted. "Are we, Sis? Can I ride on the front seat, can I?"

"Keep still, Loomis. You're very late, Adele," Mrs. Crane remarked. "I suppose you were waiting for Marcia. We'll have to hurry now to get supper—it's so hard to manage alone."

"Never mind, mother," said Adele. "I'll have it ready."

"And how are you, Marcia?" Mrs. Crane went on. "It's been days since I've seen you, but I expect you've been too busy to stop in. Aren't those furs lovely—it's a new set, isn't it? A present from Philip, I suppose. Perhaps

7—Ains.

Marcia will let you borrow her old ones sometimes, Adele——"

Roscoe Crane said nothing, but he put down his book and looked at Marcia over the top of his spectacles, as though trying to recall a familiar face.

Marcia stood in the doorway and gazed at them all, without replying to their characteristic greetings. Adele had gone at once to the fireplace and was watching her sister anxiously. It looked very much as though Marcia were about to make a scene.

"It really is quite late, isn't it?" Adele remarked, in an effort to say something natural—the sort of remark she might have made just before settling back in a dentist's chair—but she only succeeded in adding to the oppressive silence with her empty words.

It grew unbearable finally, the silence of Marcia's cold gaze, of her utter immobility, the silence of their suddenly arrested attention, as though they had all been figures in an ugly tapestry, caught for all time in this imprisoning moment.

Little Loomis squirmed around in his chair finally.

"Gee whiz, Sis!" he exclaimed. "What's biting you? Feeling punk, are you, Sis?"

"Keep still, Loomis," Mrs. Crane reproved him from force of habit, but Marcia had begun to speak at last. She did not move from the doorway, and her words came slowly, in little sentences, like odds and ends out of a bag.

"I gave my old furs away," she said. "To my maid."

"Oh, what a pity!" Mrs. Crane exclaimed, ignoring Adele's frowning look.

"I didn't think Adele would care for my cast-off things," Marcia continued, and Mrs. Crane did not finish something that she had been on the point of saying. "And I'm not going to take you to supper. I'm sorry. I came in to tell you something."

"Yes—what is it, Marcia—Loomis was only joking——"

"You wanted me to marry Philip," Marcia said. "It was to furnish me with a home. And make one less to take care of in this family. That was the idea, wasn't it?"

"Those were some of the reasons," her mother admitted. She could not imagine what had come over Marcia. The subject had never been referred to since that day last summer, and now right in front of her father, and Loomis!

"Yes," Marcia went on. "Those were some of the reasons. I thought you understood why I did it. I thought you would realize what it meant. I've been a fool."

"Marcia!" Mrs. Crane exclaimed. "Whatever is the matter?"

"You don't realize it at all," Marcia told her. "You don't think I made any sacrifice. All you think of is what you can get out of it. It was bad enough marrying him that way in the first place. Just to help you. Now it's you who do nothing but help yourselves to Philip's——"

"Really, Marcia——"

"I've done my best to do things for you. All sorts of things, because doing them was the only excuse for having married him. And I'm not looking for thanks. But I thought at least you would understand. And all you've done is complain among yourselves because I didn't do more. You don't even ask for things now. You simply reproach me if I don't give them to you. You take too many things for granted!"

Mrs. Crane tried again to say something, but she only stammered silently. In her heart she knew that what Marcia was saying was true. Little by little their debt to her which could never be paid had become, from that very fact, a debt which need never be paid. It had been such a novel thing at first to receive and accept things—for a

while the easy ways of least resistance had been so inviting—and then the habit was upon them all, and to think of Marcia was to expect, until finally to see her was to demand.

And Eliza Crane knew that in this she herself had had a part.

Adele was looking at her finger tips, while Roscoe Crane tried to summon up enough courage to tiptoe out of the room. He always tiptoed out of the room on occasions of this sort. Of them all, Loomis alone now remained fundamentally at his ease, and even edified by these proceedings.

"Geemanetty!" he thought to himself. "Sis has gone nutty or something. She's sassing ma!" Such an occurrence was almost unique in his experience, and quite unconsciously he sent a look of surreptitious appreciation of the situation at his father.

"That's all you think of," Marcia began again. "How many servants I have for you to borrow. What my new furs are like and what I've done with my old ones. Whether I'm going to take you to supper. Why I don't come across with this, and that, and the other thing. All day long!"

"Oh, come on, Marcia!" Adele managed to put in. "She got sore at me," she explained to the others, "because I said something fresh to her a little while ago, and now she's just exaggerating things. I'm sorry I said it. You've been a peach, Marcia—we all know how you've—how you—how——" She found it quite impossible to go on in the face of her sister's ironical smile, and her sentence dwindled away on her lips like the last thread of water from an emptying cask.

"Nix on the sob stuff, cutie!" Marcia reminded her. "You won't need it from now on. If it's been so soft for me, I'd like to know what it's been for you, while it lasted. But you're through. Do you understand? You're through, all of you!"

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CHAPTER XII.

"Marcia!" Mrs. Crane had found her voice again. "You don't know what you're saying—what could you have done to her, Adele—you're all upset, or you wouldn't be saying such things about your own family."

"I'm not saying them about my family," Marcia told her. "I'm saying them about a bunch of grafters. Oh, I don't blame you—I'm just as bad. But I'm sick of it, that's all."

"But, Marcia——"

"There isn't any but. You've had your fling. From now on I intend to see that Philip isn't made a fool of by you, as well as by his wife!"

She stopped suddenly and turned in the doorway, just as Roscoe Crane finally managed to get to his hesitating feet.

"Marcia!" he called to her anxiously. "Marcia—you're not angry with me? Have I done something——"

Marcia turned again and smiled at him reassuringly.

"No, father," she said quite gently. "You haven't done anything. I'm not angry with you. I'm not angry with any one, except myself."

This time she was gone before they knew it, and in a few seconds they heard the quickening throb of her departing car.

"Good-night, nurse!" Adele exclaimed, and slammed her way into the kitchen.

"I declare," Mrs. Crane began nervously. "I've never known Marcia to lose her temper that way. Something must have happened to——" but she did not finish her sentence. Her husband was standing before her, shaking an inky and entirely unaccustomed finger under her nose.

In his forgotten corner Loomis sat with amazed eyes, and startled ears.

"Eliza!" his father had just said. "If you haven't sense enough to see what's happened, then for the love of God, shut up!"

Marcia told Philip about it a few days later.

They were sitting in their living room after dinner watching the fire, while Philip poked inquisitively at the bowl of his pipe with a broken match. She had not meant to tell him at first, knowing that he would very soon see for himself that there was a new order of things as far as the Cranes were concerned, and she had no desire to take credit for having put an end to a state of affairs about which he had never complained.

But when Philip himself began to talk about Honolulu——

It was the hour of the day that Marcia dreaded most, perhaps. There were other hours which had to be lived through, but somehow this comfortable, well-fed, expansive hour, when more than at any other time Philip came to her for spiritual entertainment, was the hardest. This laughing, natural, companionable Philip, who sprawled his length before the hearth and told her funny stories punctuated with little spontaneous masculinities, was to Marcia the most unbearable of all his aspects. At all events it always seemed to her that in such moments she was cheating him more than on all other occasions.

"They've got the stuff in an old washer in their laundry," Philip was saying. "Sam says it stinks to Heaven, and Marian thinks it's getting ready to blow the roof off any minute, but it seems there'll be five gallons of it. Say, do you know what was the matter with that stuff we made?"

"No—Dicky Stark said it gave him vacillations of the diaphragm after two glasses!"

"We didn't put in enough juniper berries. I'm going to try it again with Sam's dope. He got it from the cop in the village, so I guess it's all right."

"You won't get Richard to try it. He says he's off 'hooch' until some one invents an antitoxin so you can get vaccinated against it."

"Yes, and in the meantime he's dispensing quite a rat killer of his own. He told us in the train this morning that prohibition is the mother of invention, and that intoxication begins at home."

"I seem to have heard that before somewhere," Marcia smiled. "I think Archie Craig's line is better—home brew's company, tea is none!"

"Oh, that's not too good," Philip objected. "Although I'll admit it's pretty good for Archie. Sam pulled a pretty good one himself to-day at lunch—he said that whisky led a very hand-to-mouth existence these days."

Marcia laughed quite heartily at this pleasantry, while Philip had a spell of blowing through his pipe like a Triton, without any appreciable effect.

"Look here," he asked her. "I suppose you'll want some stuff for tomorrow. You're giving a party at the Grill Club, aren't you?"

"Yes, it's my turn," Marcia told him. "I suppose the men will want high balls. Dicky said he'd bring some of his own. It's not a very large party, anyway. Just the Starks, and Archie, and Dorothy, and Sam, and Marian, and I guess the Rowlands, and the Westons, and probably one or two others."

"Did you ask Mary Ransom?"

"No—I didn't, as a matter of fact."

"Isn't it rather pointed, not to ask her?"

"I don't see why," Marcia replied. "I haven't asked Adele, for instance. Mary Ransom doesn't fit in with that crowd at all. Grill suppers aren't in her line. We're just going off to have a time by ourselves—fool around in the afternoon, and then cook our own supper—steak and hot dogs as usual—

then I suppose Sam and Archie will insist on our playing poker!"

"Yes, I know—deuces wild, openers, and all the rest of it. Whatever you do, don't start playing red dog! Roll the bones if you must, but keep away from red dog. Dicky Stark's hipped on it—borrows all the money he can get his hands on and then does nothing but say 'pot high' all night. It takes at least three people to keep track of his I O U's."

"Oh, he won't have a chance with Mildred there," said Marcia. "She takes everything he's got, including his watch, away from him and puts him at the piano to play inspirational music as she calls it. By the way, I suppose you won't get there at all, will you, if you have to go to town in the morning?"

"No, I'm afraid I can't make it. I'm sorry. I won't be home until the middle of the afternoon some time, and I won't have time to go all the way out to Quinissikook and get back for that dinner of the governors at the Greenchester Club. It's a great way to spend a Saturday, I must say!"

"Yes, it's too bad——"

"Say, honey," he asked her suddenly. "I read a long drool to-day about the Walter Reed Hospital. There's never been any word from that bird out there in Honolulu, has there?"

"No—he disappeared."

"It's a darn shame. I wish we could have brought him home. I wonder what kind of a person he was—you saw him, didn't you?"

"Yes, I saw him once—at a distance."

"You didn't get a chance to talk to him at all?"

"No, I didn't get a chance to talk to him——" She must change this subject at all costs before Philip began to ask any more questions. It was then that Marcia thought of her interview with her family. "Philip," she said to

him. "There's something I want to tell you."

"Shoot!"

"I had a talk with Adele, and mother, and all the family, the other day."

"What about?"

"About—well, about them and—and us. You know. Now don't shake your head. You've been very patient about it, but I—I saw it had to stop, and—and I told them so."

"The hell you did!"

"Yes, I told them—well, never mind what I told them, but I guess they understand. Anyway, they won't bother you—us any more."

"Well!" Philip hesitated. "Gosh, you needn't have done that, you know. I must say that Adele and Loomis get my goat sometimes, but I—I hope you haven't had a row with them over it?"

"Oh, not a row exactly," Marcia told him. "We always speak pretty plainly in our family. I think you'll find they'll leave us alone now, that's all."

Philip sat up suddenly and leaned over toward Marcia.

"Is that what you want, my dear?" he asked.

"What do you mean——" She pretended not to understand him. He came a little closer and slipped his arm in behind her shoulders. The pipe had fallen neglected to the floor.

"Is that what you want?" he asked again. "That we should be left alone?"

"I don't know what you mean, Philip," Marcia protested again. She was afraid to look into his eyes, and she did not dare get up.

"Have you felt it, too?" He began to speak very fast, but almost in a whisper. She knew that he was very close to her, touching her hair with his lips—it was a favorite trick of Philip's—and his hand lay suddenly heavy on her arm. "Have you felt that all this time we haven't been really alone with each other—I'm not talking about the

others—I mean there's been something with us always—even at times when we've been closest to each other there's been something between us——"

Marcia made a little fluttering gesture with her hands, and Philip caught them both in his own. At the same time he drew her to him and held her very close, while he kissed the corner of the little drooping mouth.

"Marcia, my darling," he was whispering again. "I don't know how to love you any more than I do—and I don't know how to tell you how much that is except in the way I always have. I want you to be so happy, dear——"

"But I am, Philip—I am," Marcia cried. With all her heart she wanted him to believe that. It was not his fault if her happiness was a mockery. If only the telephone would ring, or something, she was thinking to herself. It would have been better if she had let him go on talking about Honolulu—she had simply jumped out of the frying pan into the fire by changing the subject.

"Are you?" he smiled. "Are you? Are you satisfied with the way things are—has our marriage meant everything to you that you had hoped?"

"Everything that I had hoped? Why, yes—yes, Philip," she told him. "Hasn't it to you?" She realized at the moment that she could no more have helped asking him that question than a moth can keep from flying into the beckoning flame.

He let go of her suddenly and leaned forward with his chin in his hands.

"You're easily satisfied," he muttered. "Or else I had it doped out all wrong——"

"Philip, what do you mean?" she asked him again. "Aren't you satisfied? Have you been—been disappointed? You've never said anything to me——"

"Yes, dear, I'm afraid I have," he answered after a moment. "I know

"we've never talked like this before, and I don't know what started us on it, but I can't pretend any longer——"

Marcia caught her breath and glanced at his frowning face.

"What a dreadful pity," she said to herself, inadequately enough.

It had never occurred to her before that Philip might be pretending as deeply as she herself was. Just as a few days ago it had never occurred to her that Adele—her whole family—could take the attitude about her marriage which had been flung at her.

Duncan White was alive, and she would face that question when the time came—and her faith in her family had been bitterly deceived, and she had disposed of that. In all these things, whatever guiding thought she had found to cling to had been to keep any of it from touching Philip.

And now that last, poor, little justification of herself was taken from her.

"There's been something between us from the very first," Philip went on again. "What's the use of beating around the bush? It's there every minute of the day. I don't know what it is, or why it is—whether it's my fault or your fault—I don't think it matters much one way or the other whose fault it is—but you—you're not *with* me, Marcia!"

He picked up his pipe from the floor and began to cram tobacco into the bowl, while the grandfather clock in the hall ticked noisily on.

"Dun-can White! Dun-can White! Dun-can White——" it seemed to be saying. Once before it had done that, Marcia remembered, but no one had noticed.

Yes, Duncan White—that was it, the thing that was always with them, always between them. Well, Marcia thought to herself, she had better tell Philip now and be done with it. Since after all the pain which she was afraid to face in his eyes had been in his heart

all this long time, there might as well be an end now to all this cheating, and lying, and pretense. She would tell him now, right away, before the clock ticked again, tell him the truth——

"Philip!" she said to him in her still, little voice, and he put down his pipe again and turned to her.

"Yes, Marcia—what is it?"

"Philip——" now the truth at last. It would not be so terribly hard after the first few words. "Philip—I want to—I want to tell you something—I have—I have decided to—tell you something——" she had already said that once though, hadn't she?

"Yes, dear—what is it?" he asked her.

"Philip," she began again. "They wanted me to marry you—they—they wanted me to marry you." That was funny, the thought flashed through Marcia's mind, she had not intended to tell him that. The other thing was so much more important, it outweighed everything else. Why did her tongue slip so treacherously into byways?

"Who wanted you to marry me—what on earth are you talking about?" Philip was insisting. For a second, perhaps, he had thought that she was about to tell him something entirely different.

"My mother — Adele — they all wanted me to," Marcia plunged ahead. "They said it would—it would make one less at home if I married you—oh, please don't do that, Philip!"

He had taken her by the shoulders suddenly and was shaking her, as though she were a gate found unexpectedly locked in his path.

"What are you trying to say?" he exclaimed. "Do you mean to sit there and tell me you married me for my money—is that it? Answer me, Marcia!" and he shook her again.

"I c-can't while you're sh-shaking me so," she complained, and his hands dropped to his sides at once.

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"I'm sorry," he said. "Now answer me."

"That was why they wanted me to," she told him. "To get me out of the way—we were—we were very poor. But that's not what—what made me do it—not just that. I wouldn't have done it even for them if—I mean—I had another reason——"

This was not the way she had meant to approach the subject at all. She had not intended to hide behind her belief in Duncan White's death—but this would have to do now.

"I don't get you at all, Marcia!" Philip said to her. "You say your family wanted you to marry me. I'm not surprised. It's perfectly plain why, from the way they've behaved ever since! I beg your pardon—we won't discuss them. You've just told me you've made things clear to them. What I want to know now is what was your reason for marrying me?"

Now, out with it—but even then Marcia caught herself in a little oddly intrusive moment of resentment that he should be willing to admit the possibility of any reason, other than that she had been in love with him.

"Philip, that's what I want to tell you," she began again. "Since you ask me—I mean, I want you to know—I—you see—I thought—I mean, I had been——"

Great heavens! What was the matter with her? It was perfectly simple, all she had to say was "I was in love with another man, and I thought he was dead," and then it would all have been easy enough after that.

"Good God Almighty, Marcia!" Philip shouted at her. "Stop stammering and fumbling around, and say whatever it is you're trying to say!"

He got up suddenly and leaned against the mantelpiece, glaring down at her, and it occurred to Marcia that she had never seen him really angry before. He looked much taller all of a

sudden, and his eyes were devouring her, and he was handsomer than ever. He must be very angry indeed to have said "Good God Almighty" that way to her. Philip never really swore in front of her. Marcia found herself wondering why it should please her so that he had done it this time.

"Don't sit there staring at me!" he cried. "I'm not going to touch you."

"Oh, aren't you!" she exclaimed quite involuntarily. "I mean, I didn't think you were."

Why on earth had she said that? And why wouldn't he touch her? She caught herself wishing that he would come and shake her again—shake the breath out of her as he had a moment before, with his strong hands on her shoulders and his white teeth gleaming. Why, if she had been in his place she would have wanted to beat him! Maybe he would after she had finished telling him——

Marcia took a sudden deep breath and tried to collect her scattered words.

"I've gotten all—all twisted, Philip," she appealed to him helplessly. "What I meant to say was—I was in love—when I married you—I was in love with—I *am* in love with——"

And then she stopped, with that same little fluttering gesture of her hands. Steam tractors would not have dragged another word of that sentence from her. She had intended to say "I am in love with Duncan White," but with each passing syllable bringing her nearer to the end Marcia understood that the sentence would never be finished. Not the way she had begun it.

Because it was not true.

For a second she stared at Philip, and her hands went up to her lips.

"Oh—oh, dear me!" she exclaimed. "I guess that's not what I meant to say after all!"

Philip made a gesture of supreme impatience. As Marcia had suspected, he

must have been very angry. At all events he let pass a priceless golden opportunity for silence.

"Oh, come on, Marcia!" he stormed at her. "Stop pussyfooting around and come to the point. Who were you in love with when you married me—who are you in love with now—I want to know, and you're going to tell me!"

And then Marcia did a thoroughly unaccountable thing, for she closed her eyes and laughed—laughed until it seemed to her that her heart would break. A moment later she stopped, as suddenly as she had begun, and looked at Philip.

"Idiot!" she said to him unexpectedly, and then in a flash she was on her feet, flying to the door, dodging away from Philip's detaining hands.

"Don't touch me!" she cried breathlessly. "Go away—leave me alone—please—"

Philip came straight for her—he did not turn aside for the big leather lounge in which she had been sitting but went across the back of it in one all-consuming stride, and she heard chairs falling over in his path—but Marcia was already in the hall.

"Go away—go away—" she cried again, and ran up the stairs. And as she went down the upper hallway it seemed to Philip that he heard her laugh again.

"Well, I'll be damned!" he exclaimed, and went back into the living room and deliberately kicked over two more chairs.

And then a door slammed somewhere upstairs.

CHAPTER XIII.

Greenchester Village Street was almost deserted early on that Saturday afternoon of Marcia's Grill Club party, when Duncan White came down the station steps and turned into it.

In fact, the traffic policeman—not he

of the juniper berries, but a colleague—had trundled away his Stop-Go sign, and relapsed into a state of decorative somnambulism in front of the flagpole.

"Sure, and it's a long time between trains in this burg," he observed yawningly. He was a foreigner to Greenchester, this traffic policeman, a native of Stamford, and these easy-going village ways irritated him after the more sophisticated bustle of his own metropolis.

They had no conception of the dignity of his position in this place, anyway. Only that very morning a sweated and tam-o'-shantered young thing with her hair down her back, who seemed to answer to the name of Miss Virginia all up and down the length of the street, had seen fit to bandy words with him from a dogcart whose somewhat unrestrained progress he had sought to delay.

"Ain't you seen me raise my hand?" he asked her haughtily. "Another time you watch out or—"

"Oh, how do you get that way?" she had hailed him without waiting to hear about the other time. "I'm only going down to Garrett's there, and I'm in a hurry. Give us the whistle and let's go; what do you say?"

And a few moments later he had overheard her parting remarks to Mr. Garrett, the butcher, as the latter was carrying her bundles out to the cart.

"Thank you, Mr. Garrett," she said, in tones which could not possibly have been meant to be confidential. "Say, who's the new M. P. on the block? I wish you'd tell him who I am, and not to stop me when I'm after the meat. Giddap, Bertha, pull your feet out of here—"

Such a thing would have been impossible in Stamford, he thought to himself as he paced monotonously back and forth. He would ask to be transferred. He paused in the midst of these reflections to speculate on the identity of the

stranger who had progressed slowly up the street, and was now looking around him curiously after stopping to light a cigarette.

"Must be old-home week!" the disgruntled policeman remarked, and derived enormous satisfaction from this pleasantry.

"So this is Greenchester!" Duncan White was thinking. "A lovely place by the sea, she said it was. Well, I don't see any signs of the sea, and they can take it and pour it all back into its bottle for all of me—but Greenchester looks rather pleasant, I must say."

Rather pleasant, yes—the Town Hall with its old white portico, the flagpole, the fenced-in grass plot where the Boston Road came in, the inn with its dilapidated sign, relic of tavern days, an old square window-paned frame house or two, and all the gaudy little shops in a row. All of it against a background of trees which must look very green indeed in the late spring, under a boisterous March sky, all white and blue, filled with the roaring wind of the outgoing lion, as though that could keep April away!

Very pleasant, all of it, and then there was something else about it which puzzled him. He had had the feeling once or twice recently in other places, and each time it had puzzled him, as though he were on the point of making a tremendous discovery.

Once in Chicago for instance, as he was walking down Michigan Avenue. He could not put his finger on it exactly—a gust of breeze from the lake, a sound of bumping freight cars, a smell of smoke—whatever it was, it had all seemed to fit into place suddenly, like the unexpected answer to a riddle. Only he could not remember the riddle.

For, of course, Duncan White did not remember that he had been born in Chicago.

Then again, just the other day, in New York. In the home-going crowds on the avenue, at Forty-second Street, a newsboy had startled him with his strident cry, and for a desperately vivid second he had seemed to miss something old, as though a familiar picture had suddenly been changed. There should have been flags flying from all those flagpoles, many different flags, flags with stripes, and flags with crosses, and many flags with stars. The whole street should have been quivering with color. He was absolutely certain of these things—and then the certainty of them had passed, leaving him ill at ease, with the newsboy's cry still ringing in his ears.

And now this place, Greenchester. It attracted him, it appealed to him, the feel of its asphalt pavement was comfortable under his feet. A vague expectancy seemed to fill his mind, as though there were something very agreeable to be done here if he only knew how. His eyes were restless with fulfilled conjecture. This Greenchester was so exactly like what he had imagined it to be—the Town Hall, the flagpole, the inn with its dilapidated sign.

At any rate he had taken it for granted that it was dilapidated.

"What's the matter with me anyway?" he laughed. It was the way he had so often felt at five o'clock!

For an eagerly yearning second or two he caught himself believing that he had known about the sign even before he had seen it. Perhaps Miss Sims had told him. And then as he turned to look across the road, not knowing why he had turned, he realized that it was to see the steeple of the church above the treetops. Yes, there it was, and of course there was a policeman out there in front of the flagpole—and then—and then—

The strange prophetic moment had passed, and he knew only that he was

in Greenchester, at the end of a very long journey.

Mary Ransom arose that morning with an overpowering sense of being extremely bored. A prolonged contemplation of her scarcely awakened, and consequently somewhat unprepossessing features in the big mirror merely served to accentuate the feeling without satisfactorily explaining its causes. The only thing that was clear was that she had quite obviously gotten out of bed on the wrong side. It was only as she was discarding her bedroom slippers that she remembered, and she allowed the hot water to run much too long while she sampled the full unpleasantness of her recollection.

This was the day of Marcia Blagden's Grill Club party, and she had not been asked. Adele Crane had taken pains to remind her of the fact the day before.

"What are you taking up to Quinnsikook to-morrow?" she had inquired.

"I'm not going," Mary Ransom had been obliged to reply, in the tone of voice of one refusing carrots at dinner.

"Oh, aren't you!" exclaimed Adele. "I didn't know you'd given up your membership. What's the big idea?"

"I haven't given up my membership," Mary Ransom told her. "We're life members anyway. I wasn't asked. Were you?"

"Oh, dear me, no," Adele laughed. "Marcia isn't speaking to me these days—just a little family tiff. We shall doubtless kiss again with tears in due course of time. It was my fault anyway. But I am surprised she left you out, Mary, dear!"

"Don't let it worry you too much, Adele," Mary Ransom advised her. "I won't cancel my subscription to the *Mirror* on account of it—in fact, I'm going around to-morrow and give your father his two dollars!"

Mary Ransom was tremendously

pleased with herself for having thought of that, and she smiled brilliantly with the tips of her teeth at the sight of Adele giving an imitation of a thermometer under extreme caloric pressure, as she remarked afterward to her mother.

"And besides," Mary Ransom went on. "I'm not in the habit of being asked to Marcia's parties the way you are—I mean, ever since she married Philip, for of course she never gave parties before that, did she?"

H'm, yes, not so bad, Adele thought to herself.

"That's perfectly true, of course," she replied. "I do go to a great many of them—I'm always invited with my hat off, so to speak. But then, of course, that makes it much less of a treat for me to be asked to one of Marcia's parties."

Mary Ransom began to smile a trifle less brilliantly.

"I know we had a row the other day," Adele concluded. "But, as a matter of fact, I thought, of course, Marcia had left me out so as to make room for you!"

And Adele had departed, not altogether displeased with the last twist which she had given to the conversation, although she realized that she would think of something much better to say in a moment. Still, she had handed Mary Ransom change for her two dollars!

At all events the next morning that change was still jingling in the pocket of Mary Ransom's memory, and she dressed and breakfasted in an increasing state of vindictive displeasure. Lunch, filled with the chatter of Patricia's description of the various departures for Quinnsikook which she had witnessed, brought with it no amelioration.

"Mr. Garrett," Patricia announced. "He said Mr. Stark couldn't have any hot dogs because Virginia had taken

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all the sausages—and Virginia nearly got pinched by the new cop for being fresh to him—and Mr. Stark slipped and fell and broke his crystal——"

"Patricia!"

"Only he said it didn't matter so long as he hadn't broken his bottle—and Mr. Craig, he stalled his engine on the block, and he swore something terrible, and I heard him—and his sister, she said 'Little Pitchers,' and he said, 'What the hell do I care! Look out for that bag, can't you,' and——"

"Keep still, Patricia!"

"And—and I most forgot, old Mr. Blagden he said to tell Pop not to forget the governors of the Greenchester Club."

"The governors of the Greenchester Club? What do you mean?"

"It's a dinner, and Pop's not to forget because they have to have a quotation."

"Oh, I know. Yes, that is to-night. Quorum, I suppose you mean?"

"I guess so—and Philip Blagden, he's not going to Quinissikook because he's going to New York, and he's going to the dinner, too——"

"All right, Patricia, all right—finish your dessert now and stop chattering."

With the whole empty afternoon before her Mary Ransom found herself remembering categories of little postponed duties, none of which alone had been worth attending to at the time, but whose total array on a penciled slip of paper was sufficient to occupy an hour's activity in the village. Little unpaid bills, a picture to be framed, her wrist watch to be called for, the purchase of some hairpins, the renewal of the *Mirror* subscription—various other odds and ends.

Mary Ransom ordered the station car brought around and drove herself listlessly away in the direction of Greenchester Street.

Duncan White aroused himself from

his speculative contemplation of the village to a more immediate concern over the original purpose of his visit to Greenchester, and a little mirthless laugh forced its way to his lips as the significance of his presence in this place came to mock at him.

He had learned to laugh at his trouble, to accept the present cheerfully and look courageously into the future, since the past was denied him, but there were little moments in the midst of it all over which he stumbled, when he could not keep his soul from frowning, and during which his footsteps led him along paths of bitterness.

"Little gobs of gloom!" he called them, and blew smoke rings at them.

Such moments as this, when it seemed to him that his intention of locating the Sims farmhouse near Greenchester, and calling to find out if Marjorie Sims were still on her vacation, was deeply underlaid with an irrepressible desire to see some one who might be greeted as a friend. Some one even as distantly related to his personal affairs, as recently associated with them, as was Miss Sims, whose speech and companionship, nevertheless, would help to create an illusion of long-established intimacy, such as he could enjoy in the presence of no other human being except the doctor in far-away Honolulu.

Besides the latter, correspondence with whom seemed impossible at the present time without appearing to invite a renewal of those obligations from which he had fled, Miss Sims was the only person whom he might invest with the many-colored livery of such a service.

The thought angered him a little—that he should have come seeking her in order to gratify his longing for a form of human intercourse which was forbidden him elsewhere. This attempted interruption of his loneliness seemed to detract from the very real

pleasure which he had anticipated in seeing Marjorie Sims herself. He was not sure that he cared to see her at all with this thought uppermost in his mind, and yet, after all, why else should he have come across a continent to look for "the little old farm in Connecticut?"

"Why, indeed?" he remarked to himself, and allowed his gaze to rest upon the policeman in front of the flagpole. "No harm in asking, anyway," he concluded, and approached the representative of the law with a smiling inquiry.

"Sims?" that dignitary replied to Duncan White's question, as though he were being confronted for the first time, and very probably the last, with some outlandish biological freak, something that could not possibly exist. "Can't say as I do, no—let me see, Sims—no."

"I thought possibly you might be familiar with the name," Duncan White explained. "I'm a stranger here—"

"Keep a farm do they?" asked the other. "Somewhere near Greenchester, hey? It's quite likely they do—I couldn't say. I'm a stranger here myself."

"Oh, you're a stranger here yourself!" Duncan White exclaimed, restraining an ill-advised impulse to poke his would-be informant in the eye. "Well, I guess I've come to the wrong man. Reminds me of a story I heard about the Grand Central Station in New York. There was a chap who stammered to beat the band standing by the information desk, and another bird rushed up to him to ask where he'd find a train for Albany, and the guy who stammered said, 'S-s-say, out of f-five h-hundred p-p-people in this s-sta-station, why p-pi-pick on m-me!'"

"That's a good one, ain't it?" the policeman admitted. "Now there ain't so much to this Greenchester, but you've got me when it comes to spotting farm-houses. Guess almost any one in the

village would be able to tell you, though."

"Where would be a good place to ask, do you think—at the bank, perhaps?"

"They'd be closed on account of it being Saturday—tell you what, why not ask at the office of the *Mirror*?"

"What's that?"

"The Greenchester *Weekly Mirror*—it's the newspaper. They'd be likely to have them on their list of subscribers—can't do any harm to ask, they're always open."

"That's a good idea," Duncan White agreed. "I'll do that. Down there, you say, above the undertaker's—oh, first turn to the right—thank you very much."

There was no one in the outer office of the *Mirror* when Duncan White pushed open the door and gazed dubiously around him at that amazingly dingy apartment. In fact it did not look as though there could ever have been any one there, so utterly abandoned was its appearance. But from somewhere within, beyond the other door, came a doleful sound of flute playing which seemed to justify further investigation. Duncan White knocked at this door and the flute playing stopped abruptly.

"Who is it—I mean, come in!" said a startled voice.

Duncan White opened the door and kept back a smile at the sight of Roscoe Crane peering at him over his spectacles, while he tried with nervous hands to stuff the flute into a drawer of his desk. Then he changed the smile into one of greeting and released it as he stepped forward into this extraordinary sanctum.

"I beg your pardon for disturbing you," he began. "I'm looking for some information, and the policeman advised me to come here."

"The policeman!" Roscoe Crane ex-

claimed, and his face lighted up with pleasurable expectation. A mystery perhaps, another crime—possibly his visitor was a detective.

"Yes," Duncan White laughed. "The minion who controls your traffic. He thought perhaps you could put me on the track. Am I speaking to the editor of the *Greenchester Mirror*?"

"Yes—yes indeed, the *Greenchester Weekly Mirror*—we are only a small community and cannot support a daily. I am the editor; yes, Roscoe Crane is my name—possibly you have heard—I mean, I am entirely at your service."

"Thank you. I—my name is—I am Ulysses Mann—"

Duncan White had never been able to overcome that second of hesitancy which kept him stammering whenever he had to give that name which he had made up for himself. He had had to have a name, and little Kinau's "Mr. Man" had suggested itself at once, slightly modified to avoid comment. The Ulysses had been a whimsicality of his own. But it always made him feel like a thief somehow.

"Won't you sit down, Mr. Mann," the editor was saying. "What was it you wished to know—the resources of my paper are at your disposal." He managed to say it with quite an air, too, Duncan White thought to himself.

"Thank you, Mr. Crane," he replied. "You are very kind. I am trying to locate some people called Sims. I believe they own a farm somewhere near here. The only member of the family I know is a Miss Marjorie Sims—she was a trained nurse. I wondered if perhaps you might have them on your list of subscribers?"

"I see," Roscoe observed in a highly judicial tone. "I dare say we have—our circulation is unusually high in the rural districts. Of course, you understand we don't make a practice of giving out addresses, but under special circumstances—what, if I may ask, is the

nature of your business with these people—I mean—well, you know—"

"I haven't any business with them," laughed Duncan White. "My interest is simply social. I should be very glad to call on them if I could get hold of the address. I—I was passing through Greenchester and thought I would like to pay them a visit, that is to say, Miss Sims. I don't know the rest of the family."

"Oh, I see," said Roscoe. "Then you're not a—I mean, you're not—you're not here officially?"

"Officially? No—how do you mean?"

"Well, you understand—I thought perhaps you were from headquarters."

"Why, no. I'm not from any headquarters!"

"Then you're not a detective?" Roscoe Crane was unable to cover up his disappointment at this failure of his visitor to live up to the expectations aroused by his mention of the policeman.

"Good heavens, no!" Duncan White exclaimed. "I'm a truck driver!"

"A truck driver!" Roscoe Crane repeated incredulously. "But—but you don't look like a truck driver!" He seemed to have a hazy idea somewhere in the back of his head that all truck drivers wore greasy overalls, and this Mr. Mann's appearance was far removed from such a picture. Nor was his speech similar to that of any truck driver with whom he had ever come in conversational contact.

"Well, I'm not driving a truck now," Duncan White went on to explain. "Did you think I had the old bus out there in the street? No, I'm having a holiday just now; that's why I'm all dolled up."

"Oh, yes—well, well—" Roscoe Crane was not an adept at intercourse with truck drivers, even when they were "all dolled up," as this one might certainly be said to be. "Where—where

are you employed, Mr. Mann? I take it you are a stranger to Greenchester?"

"Yes, I am. I don't think I've ever—I mean I don't know this part of the country at all. I'm going to have a job in Newark, as garage foreman with the Transcontinental Truck Company. They sent me on from Denver."

"From Denver! That's quite a jump now, isn't it?"

"It certainly was!" Duncan White laughed, and then he frowned a little at himself. Here he was again, talking thirteen to the dozen to a stranger, just for the pleasure of hearing himself speak. It had been the same with the policeman when he told him the story about the Grand Central Station—he could never resist the temptation to talk when an opportunity presented itself.

"Then you've only recently come East?" Roscoe Crane was asking. With him, too, conversation pure and simple was a good deal of a luxury.

"Yes," Duncan White told him. "I was messing around in their plant out in Denver. They were getting ready for a big stunt demonstration. 'Ship by truck' movement, you know. They were going to send a truck from Denver to New York to prove it could be done in spite of the weather and the bum roads."

"You don't say! Quite an undertaking, wasn't it? Out for a record I suppose?"

"Yes, a reliability record. The idea was for the truck to get from Denver to New York without getting stuck anywhere. They could make repairs in regular garages in towns where they stopped overnight as long as they were ready to start again in the morning, and they were not to get stuck anywhere on the road so they were forced to send for help, do you see?"

"Oh, yes. And did you come with the truck?"

"Yes. One of the crew was taken

sick at the last minute, and I happened to be there handy and they sent me along in his place."

It had all been very curious, Duncan White was thinking, his discovery of himself as a mechanic. It had begun back there on the tramp steamer from Honolulu when something had gone wrong in the engine room. He had heard them talking—valves, piston rods, cylinders—and in a flash it had come to him that he knew all about those things. As though a hand from the past had taken him by the shoulder and pushed him toward the engine-room companionway. And then he had come to Denver and found himself one morning in the garage of the Transcontinental Truck Company asking for a job.

"Say, that new guy, Mann," he had heard the foreman say later on that day. "He sure is some shark at a truck. He'd tease a spark out of two bits of wood!"

And then they had sent him along on the demonstrator—almost all the way to Greenchester which had seemed so far away.

"What a trip you must have had!" Roscoe Crane was marveling, scenting copy.

"You said something!" Duncan White laughed. "We were to get a thousand dollars apiece, the two of us, if we made it, and believe me we nursed her along! Our best stunt was coming into Syracuse in a blizzard with me riding backward on the hood!"

"On the hood! What on earth——"

"You know there's a thing in the engine called the timer. There's a top to it all hitched up to a lot of wires—anyway if it comes off and you lose the bolts you're cooked. Engine can't run. Well, it happened to us. Passed out on the road, and the bolts had fallen through and gone to glory. So I rode on the hood hanging on to a strap from the driver's seat and held the top of the

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timer on with my free hand. That was some ride!"

"I should think you would have burned yourself—your hand!"

"I wasn't worrying so much about my hand," Duncan White laughed again. "Have you ever *sat* on the hood of a truck for any length of time?"

"Why, no——"

"Well, just try it some time! Anyway, we made it, and we got our thousand bucks."

"Well, well—what a responsibility! You must have been with them for some time out in Denver to be chosen for the job."

"That's the joke of it," Duncan White explained. "I'd only been there a week or so, as a matter of fact. Just come in from San Francisco."

"Indeed! What were you doing out there?"

"Well, I just passed through Frisco—yes, I've wandered around a good deal—that's why I—I'm called Ulysses I guess! I'd just come off a tramp steamer."

"Gracious me!" Roscoe Crane exclaimed. "You're quite a rolling stone, yes. Been all over the world, I suppose?"

"Well, I've been in Russia—Odessa—and in Siberia, and China—Vladivostok—I—I don't know where all."

"Where were you bound from on your last trip?"

"From Honolulu," Duncan White replied, and Roscoe Crane let his chair drop suddenly to the floor.

"Honolulu!" he repeated. "I wonder—did you ever hear of a man out there called Foster—a doctor?"

Duncan White managed to keep absolutely quiet.

"Foster?" he said. "A doctor—I—I don't think so. Why do you ask?"

"I had to write to him once," Roscoe Crane explained. "A very private matter. About one of his patients. A case of lost memory——"

"What?"

"I say a case of lost memory. The man disappeared shortly afterward. I thought possibly you might have heard tell of it."

Duncan White had often wondered what he would do if he ever found himself in the presence of a situation such as this. As a matter of fact he did nothing at all.

"You were interested in this man?" he asked in a perfectly level voice. "You knew something about him?"

"It's a very strange case," Roscoe Crane replied. "I—I was in communication with some people who knew about him, yes. Some people who thought they had the clew to this man's identity—why, what's the matter, Mr. Mann?"

Duncan White had sprung from his chair and grasped Roscoe Crane by the arms.

"For God's sake, Mr. Crane!" he was stammering. "What—what do you know about it? I am the man!"

For a moment or two Roscoe Crane could do nothing but splutter. He had in his turn seized Mr. Ulysses Mann by the arms, and the two of them were swaying back and forth over the desk, clutched in each other's grasp.

"Gosh all Friday and Saturday!" Roscoe managed to articulate at last. "You—you're the man from Honolulu? Thought you said your name was Mann—Ulysses Mann?"

"It's fake," Duncan White shouted back, oblivious of the fact that their noses were only inches apart. "Had to have a name—made it up—I can't remember my own name!"

Roscoe Crane let go his hold on the other's arms and fell back into his chair.

"Can you beat it—can you beat it?" he appealed to the world in general. "'Patient disappeared, no trace Foster'—and then he walks into my office rid-

ing on a truck—no, I don't mean that—I mean——”

“Never mind what you mean,” Duncan White put in. “What do you know about me, that's what I want to know.”

“Give me time to think,” Roscoe pleaded. “One thing at a time—I mean, listen here. I haven't any right to say anything—it's too important a matter—I mean, I've got to send a telegram, that's all!”

He jumped up from his chair and almost danced across the room to the door, utterly ignoring Duncan White's strenuous efforts to stop him, and then he turned and danced back again.

“Look here,” he exclaimed. “This is the biggest thing that's ever happened in Greenchester—now wait a minute, I'm just as anxious as you are. I've got to send a telegram—only be gone a moment, then I'll come back and talk to you——”

“Oh, damn the telegram——” Duncan White began, but Roscoe Crane's mind was made up. That message to the *New York Herald* shone like a beacon in the chaos of his thoughts.

“I've got to send that telegram,” he insisted. “Or else it won't get into tomorrow's paper—never mind, I'll explain afterward. Now sit down here and don't stir until I come back, will you? Begin writing it all down from the beginning—don't leave anything out. My Aunt Susan! It's the biggest scoop since the Lord made nutmegs, and to think——”

He was gone this time before Duncan White could put out a hand to prevent him, and the sound of his stumbling footsteps came clattering up from the steep wooden stairs. There he was now, flying up the street with his coat tails in the wind.

“The darned old fool!” Duncan White stormed. “Why couldn't he tell me! He'll be gone for hours now probably, and I'll have to stew around

up here all alone until he comes back—oh, damn——”

He began to pace restlessly back and forth, trying to collect his thoughts, to keep from shouting and upsetting things, and behaving like a child. It was so unexpected, so utterly astounding. So difficult to control his hopes and prevent himself from expecting too much.

“It isn't so, probably,” he kept saying to himself. “It can't be true. It's all a mistake—he doesn't know anything—he couldn't know anything. It's somebody else he's talking about. Great dog! Do you suppose he knows who I am, and all about me, and *everything*——”

He stopped for a second near the desk and looked blankly at the paper and pencils the editor had gathered together for his use. He was to begin writing it all down, the other had begged.

“Yes, fat chance!” Duncan White exclaimed. “Does he think for a minute I'm going to sit down here and start writing the story of my life while I'm waiting for him to come back? What does he think I am?”

And then, having voiced his protest against such a course, Duncan White took a pencil and a sheet of paper and drew a chair up to the window.

“Might as well put down a few dates,” he conceded. “It may help if he really knows anything.”

Odessa—everything began at Odessa as far as he was concerned. That was in July, 1919. Then what? Siberia—the Desert of Gobi, the editor would be keen for that probably—Vladivostok—Honolulu. Doctor William Foster, Kahilihani Street. Honolulu—that ought to prove his identity as the man in Honolulu, although he had just said he did not know Foster. Heaven knows, there was little enough he could put down.

“I beg your pardon,” said an un-

heralded and entirely unexpected voice at his elbow. 'Is Mr. Crane out? I want to pay my subscription—Miss Mary Ransom.'

CHAPTER XIV.

"More and better sausages! That's what we want—more and better sausages!"

The cry came intermittently from Dicky Stark, interrupting Archie Craig's vocal quest of the bread knife in use at the moment as a remover of oven lids, the proper hooklike implement for that purpose having been commandeered by some one as an ice pick.

Out in the big, raftered room Mildred Stark and the Rowlands were having what Billy Weston described as a hand-to-hand combat with the table trestles, while in the corner a thick haze of argument arose between Sam and Marian.

"Why didn't you tell me you had this stuff in another washer in the laundry?" he kept shouting at her. "I had the devil's own time getting it up here, too, over the Valley Road!"

"Well, my gracious me!" she was exclaiming. "I thought you could tell the difference between home brew and home-made dye—you poor fish!"

"Poor fish nothing—how was I to know? Might all have been poisoned!"

"Probably would have been anyway," Dicky Starr volunteered as he passed them, and ducked around the corner, only just in time to avoid the cover of the washer in question.

"It's a wise father knows his own home brewed!" Archie saw fit to declare at this point, with stupendous results entirely unrelated to the setting of the table.

"Hold on to him—look out, sit on his feet—here, put some ice down his neck—rub his nose in it—who said that, my brother? Kill him——"

8—Ains.

This last from Dorothy Craig in the midst of a discussion with Betty Weston over the steaks in the pantry.

"They're to split the child—well, you know what I mean, fifty-fifty."

"How do they manage the transfer, do you suppose, in a case like that?"

"Oh, my dear, very simple. They used to do it with governesses, and lawyers, and guards of honor, and all the rest of it—very dressy. But these days I'm told the parents meet perfectly informally and have lunch together, child being present."

"You don't say?"

"Sure—they simply trot out the infant and say, 'Child, this is your father,' or 'Child, this is your mother,' as the case may be, and there you are. Children do forget so quickly, you know! I suppose they take turns paying for the lunch and then little Rollo, or little Melisande is taken off for a six-month shift——"

"Don't be horrid, Dorothy."

So things went always at a Quinnis-sikook party, Marcia was thinking as she supervised the progress of the "hot dogs"—Virginia had provided enough of them in all conscience, incidentally, but then they would come in handy for supper——

A great deal of noise, derived from crockery and dish pans, and a succession of shouted half sentences, all utterly incomprehensible unless you happened to have heard the beginning of the conversation half an hour or so before. A general display of aprons and rolled-up shirt sleeves, quite out of proportion to the actual work being accomplished by their possessors, accompanied by loudly recriminatory admonitions to "hold it so I can reach it, you big boob!" Much of it interspersed with sudden dish-spilling antics contingent upon burned fingers, and productive of grease stains.

"Right on my best pants, too—don't put your thumb in it!"

Some inevitable breakage, resulting from some one's attempt to do a parlor trick with a glass, a fork, and a couple of corks—an enterprise foredoomed to failure since a burning steak waits for no man.

"The place for parlor tricks is obviously in the parlor," as Archie Craig once remarked. "If you expect to eat, clear out of the kitchen!"

The certainty of an eventual discovery that there was no salt to be found *anywhere*, or that the pickle jar had prematurely divorced itself from its contents, to the irreparable detriment of two layer cakes and a family of custard bowls—

"My poor fool—idiot—boob—stiff—piece of tripe—didn't I tell you to put the pickles in the other hamper?"

The degree of insult conveyed by the epithets employed increasing, of course, with the closeness of the culprit's relationship, until such classic heights of invective were reached as Sam's "You poor decayed oyster!" to his wife. A remark which she promptly avenged by putting powdered sugar in his hair.

At all events, as Dicky Stark kept proclaiming, a good time was being had by all.

Yes, by all of them, overgrown children on a picnic—men never grew up anyway—and how about herself?

Marcia had hardly had a moment in which to think since the evening before when she had slammed the door—yes, and locked it, too! For the tumult of thoughts which had assailed her and kept her wide-awake throughout the night had had no beginning and no end, had furnished her no rational understanding of this new phase of her relations with Philip. That she was in love with him, yes of course, but she had not been able to get beyond that one great transfiguring fact.

He had taken a very early train to town in the mornings, and she had not seen him at all at breakfast, and then

it had been one thing after another—telephonic corroboration of details—Virginia with her sausages and her indignation at the new policeman—the packing of hampers—all the preparations for Quinissikook, until the car had come and she had had to start. ♡

"If Mr. Blagden should call up have central connect him with the Grill Club," she had told the butler as she was leaving the house.

Marcia smiled over that now, in the smoky little kitchen, while she watched the sausages for which Dicky Stark was clamoring so loudly in the next room. Why should she have assumed that Philip might call up from his office?

"Well, and why not?" she said to herself defiantly. "I'd want to if I were him!" It was not a time for grammar—only for sausages, and for the realization of what had happened the previous evening—something that sang in the air about her, and spread before her like a sunrise.

"I called him an idiot!" she laughed out loud suddenly. "He *was*, too—only I guess I've been the real idiot, and a coward—"

Yes, she had called her husband an idiot because he had not understood what she herself had never suspected until that moment. Now everything was changed—except that terrible afternoon in Honolulu. She would tell Philip the whole thing that very evening, and they would find Duncan White together—they *must*. And then everything would be all right. Even Duncan White would understand when they found him—it was all going to be different now, her home, her husband whom she—

"We want more sausages—we want more *sausages*!" came the sudden imperious roar from the dining room, accompanied by heavy stampings of feet, and Marcia turned to the door.

"Coming, coming!" she called to them. "On the fire——"

Yes, she was having a good time, too.

Mary Ransom recognized Duncan White at once, as soon as he turned around to look at her over his shoulder and stood up.

After all it had not been quite three years, and he had not changed so very much. A little stouter, perhaps, the lips set more firmly—but she would have recognized him anywhere as long as he remained smooth shaven.

For a second or two she felt that she must be dreaming—it was impossible. But there he stood before her, Duncan White, moving, breathing, speaking. Had there ever been such a stroke of fortune! If she had been asked to Quinissikook—if she had put off doing her little chores—if she had not climbed the *Mirror* stairs at just that time! For a moment the consideration of how Duncan White happened to be there was lost in her amazement at the mere fact of his presence, and of her having stumbled on it. Mary Ransom opened her eyes very wide, and then half closed them again.

"Mr. Crane just stepped out for a moment," he was saying. "He'll be back directly—won't you take a seat?"

"Thank you, no—I can come back another time—it's of no importance," she scarcely knew what she was saying, but her eyes never left his face. And he had not recognized her, he did not remember—he *must* be the man who had been with Doctor Foster in Honolulu.

What could she do with him now that she had found him? Should she attempt to experiment with his memory now, at once, before that doddering old Roscoe Crane came back? Or would it be better to take him straight out to Quinissikook, just as he was, and let Marcia do her own experiment-

ing! The former suited her purpose better, if she could possibly manage it.

"Are you—are you associated with Mr. Crane?" she asked him, just to gain time, while she turned these things over in her mind. "You haven't been in Greenchester long, have you, Mr.——"

"I—no—I—Mann is my name," he began, and then he stopped suddenly and fidgeted with his pencil. "If you'll only wait until Mr. Crane comes back," he went on again. "He'll tell you all about me—I mean, it would sound silly coming from me—I'm afraid you don't understand——"

He had not meant to tell her all that, but she was staring at him so! But of course Mary Ransom was not staring at anything he was saying—she was really staring very hard at an impulse which had just come to her, as soon as she heard him give that name which she knew was not his own. Well, why not——

"Nonsense!" she exclaimed suddenly, and her voice rang out like the crack of a whip. "Your name isn't Mann! I know all about you."

"What—you—who are you? What do *you* know about me? Does everybody in Greenchester——"

"I don't know about that, but I know all about you. You're the man who—who lost his memory. Come now, pull yourself together and *think*. What's your name?"

"I—I don't know—honestly I don't!" "Nonsense!" she cried again. "Your name is White, there—Duncan White."

He stood staring at her blankly. The name awoke no response whatever in his mind apparently.

"Please—I don't know who you are—please don't make fun of me!" he exclaimed.

"Oh, I'm *not*," she assured him. "Don't you remember, Duncan White. You disappeared two years ago, at the

Marne. Try and think. Don't you remember being here in Greenchester—and at Sound Beach—there was a girl—oh, *think!*"

"I—I'm trying to," he whispered.

"You went away to France, with the Marines—oh, *don't* you remember?"

"Wait a minute," he said suddenly.

"Wait a minute. Flags! Flags everywhere—a street filled with flags. Has that got anything to do with it? I'm sorry to be so stupid—Mr. Crane was going to tell me——"

Was it a first glimmering of recollection? Mary Ransom had no idea what he was trying to remember, but she nodded her head vigorously.

"Never mind Mr. Crane," she told him. "Did he find out who you were, too? Well, I know more about it than he does. There *were* flags everywhere—yes, of course, it might have been Fifth Avenue in New York—does it remind you of anything?"

"I remember flags," he repeated helplessly, and then another thought came to him. "What did you say about a girl?" he asked. "You said something about a girl." His face had turned very white, and his eyes were tortured.

Mary Ransom changed her tactics.

"Oh, you remember *her*," she smiled. "That's one of the things you always have remembered. Why, you say 'Hello' to her, every day at five o'clock, don't you?"

"You know that!" he exclaimed. "Yes, I don't know why—'Hello, Marcia!'"

Mary Ransom almost chuckled out loud. After all, until that moment, she had not been *quite* sure that Duncan White and the man in Honolulu were the same, nor that either of them had any connection with Marcia.

"It will all come to you now in a minute, see if it doesn't!"—she took a deep breath and came a step nearer to him—"say it again, just as though it were five o'clock!"

"Hello, Marcia!"

"Hello, *Duncan!*"

Mary Ransom flung the words at him with all the force of all the will power in her body, and before her compelling eyes she saw him gasp, and stagger, and cry out, and then sink into the chair behind him with his face in his hands.

"Well, thank fortune—this is my lucky day!" Mary Ransom remarked to herself. "It worked——"

To be continued in the February number.





The Mannequin

By Hughes Cornell

Author of "The Hidden Garden,"
"The Killer," etc.

CIG?" Anice Worthington's latest London windfall held out to Lilla a crested case.

"Thanks," murmured Lilla, "don't smoke."

"How unconventional."

Lady Trentholme and Anice lit up. All three studied, through half-closed eyes, Roselle's latest find of a mannequin; in superprovocative décolletage, descending her three-stair steps with all the conscious nonchalance of a beauty woman on perpetual display in a beauty-mad world of play.

To be the one mannequin in tiny Maison Roselle gave the final *cachet*. One, thereupon, was established as having more than beauty; one had chic. Service at Maison Roselle had been known to lead to musical comedy; to the screen. But no musical comedy or screen beauty had ever forced the lock of the decorative atelier referred to as Roselle's salon; for that matter, no member of Roselle's exclusive clientele, except by appointment. Roselle could not boast of twelve customers, all told—and did not boast of one. They boasted of her, by the mere wearing of her gowns.

Lilla Elliott faintly moved her trim, arched brows, which she chose to wear in their lovely natural abundance, at the quiet saleswoman in meager black,

whose dark hair coiled smoothly at her neck; the rule at Maison Roselle, where any exuberance—except in bills rendered—was as sternly eliminated as was the presence of the sterner and more amiable sex. Even the glorified mannequin depended on but a single heavy pin of tarnished silver to retain her golden coil in place at the nape of her neck.

"Oh, I say!" protested Anice, "you, Mrs. Lilla Elliott, don't smoke!" And, at the mention of Lilla's names, the mannequin's spotted hazel eyes widened to take in Lilla with one comprehensive sweep. Her professional languor returned at a quiet movement on the part of the black-clad saleswoman. Rather languidly Anice continued: "That rag is mine!" She produced a hammered-gold vanity case which, uncorked, gave out a teasing fragrance. "Be a sport. Ned's forbidden full length back for you, anyway. Or," astutely, "is that the reason?"

"You can have it," Lilla negated both the gown and the flask.

"My word!" commented the lady from Lunnon, "you *ah*—"

"Calm yourself, Tranty. Lilla used to drink and smoke like the devil, when it was *verboden*," derided Anice. "Now that it's the thing—" She tossed gloved hands upward, palms out.

"Men, too?" persisted the coroneted inquirer from overseas, whose reputation—yes, lack of it—had won her social brevet.

"It's more—er—interesting, don't you think?" Lilla sweetly countered, "not to be—er—promiscuous?" The word trailed off into a sinuous uprising of her slim length from the gilt-legged ottoman. She shrugged her blue fox into place and half turned on her way to the door. "Set you down anywhere? I didn't see your car outside."

"Nevertheless we're rolling our own," Anice volubly paraphrased, her red comeliness showing a trifle congested. The titled countenance exhibited signs of recrudescence animation. You never know of what insolence your true British nobility and gentry are capable. But, Anice chuckled inwardly, all of Burke couldn't get an edge on Lilla. "The machine's at the ferry to meet Burt Ross." She shot a glance of friendly malice. "Better stay on."

Lilla did not need to stay on for that purpose, all three knew. As it turned out, on her way home she did meet Ross where he waited in front of what he styled the Haremluk, in Anice Worthington's limousine. A swagger, polo-playing personality all in browns, including eyes and hair. Lilla, the big catch of the town; but matrons catalogued him matrimony shy.

"Anice is waiting for you," sparkled Lilla—it amused her to catch him dangling after another woman—"with that London whiz—"

"What you bet she isn't?"

He was already out. He put Lilla into her own perfect runabout, polished like a long oval cabochon sapphire, and impudently followed, taking the wheel.

"How Anice will rage," flouted Lilla. "It's so becoming to her eyelashes."

She was not afraid of Anice, but a bit of mendacious flattery goes big with

a man when he feels himself abused. Ross tooled cleverly out narrow, crowded Sutter to spacious Van Ness, turned north, and Lilla tightened her veil.

"What's happening?" he asked, once safe in the forested drives of the Presidio.

"I'm closing my account at Roselle's," trivially, "count of the mannequin."

His astonishment banished his own preoccupation.

"Name of a name of a—why? You made Roselle. How'll you break it to her?"

"Send her an open check for my account in full."

He grinned. "That'll knock her dead. Only her heirs will profit. What's a mannequin to you, or you to a mannequin?"

"The creature recognized my name this afternoon while she was showing us a gown!" Lilla blazed out.

"Well, you can't expect half a million people to lose their jobs just because—"

"She showed it!" passionately. "Showed she knew—"

"What every one knows. That you and Ned are ripe to split."

"I don't know it!"

"I do. That's why I'm hanging on. Why persecute the poor working girl for reading as she runs? What is back of it we've both known all along; that you'd have married me if it had not been for the war."

Lilla sat very still. From the ambush of her crushed dull-blue toque jewel-blue flashes pierced the meshes of her veil.

"Letterman did it," his cool, languid voice carried on with savagery. "The hospital and the uniform and the spectacular going over to win crosses; while our paternal government kept me at home to build ships, make unnecessary millions automatically, and be branded a profiteer."

"We both wear that brand. I don't see how we could have helped it. I never held your staying at home against you. You had no choice."

"But you had a choice, and you chose the uniform. When your damned war work brought you and Ned together you forgot, for a few mad months, all that you and I had been to each other—and chose the uniform."

"I chose the man who filled the uniform. He's filled every splendid requirement since——"

"Except your heart."

The afternoon fog curled down, isolating them from the trees, the sky, the solid earth; as though they two were swinging through illimitable space alone, the world obliterated, the soft pulsation of the engine, the enrhythmed beating of their hearts. Through it ran a short vibration like a sob.

"Don't do that! You don't love him, any more than he really loves you. He loves to have you. You are the flaming symbol of his success; his trophy; his mannequin."

"I pay for my own——"

"And you pay for his success, by displaying it; wearing it in the eyes of the world. He does not need to boast. You boast for him—in the mere being his wife; wearing the latest creations of his political chicanery. He loves the political power of your social and financial connection that hitches up with his pull and drives him straight on up toward his cheap success. That's all life means to him—success; a succession of successes; war medals; you; city and county attorneyship; this run for the State senate, to groom him for the next governorship. Before many years—for he understands barter and trade—your millions will be building a mansion in Washington, D. C.—a bigger shop in which to display a super-mannequin. Is that all the kick you're to get out of life? To be a political-mannequin?"

She had an odd, aboriginal habit of clamping her two lines of small, gleaming, white teeth shut, and talking through them when rage swept her, as it could.

"His—mannequin!"

Roselle accepted Lilla's check without protestation. Two weeks later Lilla received a delicately engraved card announcing a recent limited importation of French gowns, to be displayed exclusively by a mannequin direct from the Rue de la Paix.

"So Roselle has changed mannequins," remarked Ross when she told him. "I wonder how long before Ned follows her example?"

"Roselle's must have come over in an airship," mocked Lilla. "Ned sticks to solid ground."

They were at Anice Worthington's dinner dance; Lilla in her gayest irresponsible mood, which she had constantly maintained since that near-tragic drive through the Presidio. Burt Ross to stigmatize her as a mannequin! Insolent! They sat in a window embrasure overlooking the bay and the Presidio forest where, just the other day, he had for a moment entrapped her elusiveness; shown her that life need not mean to her, forever, the job of a mannequin. But hadn't he been a trifle too assured? Even though once she certainly had believed herself in love with him, and still flaunted him as a pennant of that womanhood which Ned, it seemed, had forgotten. Her cheeks burned, her eyes danced. The urge of triumph was in her laugh.

"Funny of you to take a mannequin seriously," he commented. "You're a throwback to the lynching days of the fifties. Whoever makes you suffer—must suffer. Even a mannequin——"

"Like myself?" she giped.

"The girl doesn't seem to be suffering seriously. She's about pretty constantly in the cafés. They say she hates

you like sin; claims you made Roselle let her out on account of Ned."

"Ned never saw her nor heard of her. He hasn't time for women——"

"Or use, except as stepping stones—or mannequins?" Lilla turned white. "Still, they do say she goes to hear every speech he makes. Crazy about him. Out to get him—perhaps to spite you—in her way, as hard as O'Brien is in his."

"Who's O'Brien?"

"You don't get even what kick there is in politics," he accused, with masculine enjoyment. "He's the balance of power in this election. Swings the Independents."

"You old gossip!" jeered Lilla deliciously.

"If I can prove the gossip about Ned and the girl——"

"I'll get my divorce," she took him up. "But you can't. She's not his style of mannequin—if I am."

"*'Birds in their little nests agree,'*" caroled Anice, descending on them with Jim Collins, quite the premier dancer and husband-smasher of the season, "*'And 'tis a shameful sight!'*"—my turn, Lilla. Trot along."

"I say, Lilla," remonstrated slim, dark Collins, who once had worn her yoke, "you're not married to Burt——"

"Yet," mocked Anice.

"Shouldn't be mooning in a corner with him if I were." Lilla shot a tantalizing glance at Collins. "I would be holding hands with Jim."

Collins folded his hands in prayer, then floated her out on the floor in an intoxication of motion and emotion which perversely served to feed Lilla's flame of humiliation and rage.

To be sure people said things about herself and Burt; and Jim, too, for that matter. But not about her and some floorwalker or tailor's salesman. • Burt Ross, Jim Collins, were possibilities in scandal. But for Ned, whose wife had been the crowning achievement of his

ambitious youth, the high trophy of his golden manhood—for him to become a consorter with half-naked dress models! It was the cropping out of the common streak in this shopkeeper's son, against which Burt had warned her even in the fiery courtship of those war-mad days, when all castes and classes had apparently merged in the commonness of humanity. It had seemed, at that time, as though distinction of money, birth, social heredity would never again exist. And here everybody was, five years later, footbound once more in the paths marked out by their fathers. Ned, beneath the glitter of his surface impeccability, had inevitably sought out a girl of his own class for his true mate. The wife he had been so proud to win was now but his social and political mannequin. How Burt Ross could say things!

Lilla capriciously slipped out of Jim Collins' arms and went home. Ned would be in about eleven. He would speak at only two meetings that evening, he'd mentioned at dinner, casually. She had not discussed her own plans. From the first Ned had stubbornly refused society functions; society was Lilla's occupation, and he was genuinely anxious for her to continue the pursuit of it. His own business was politics and law. She had agreed to reciprocal freedom for him. Awfully logical and modern. But, somehow, it hadn't worked out as Sunday supplement essayists prognosticate. He had his future to make—and hers, was his view. As if the great-granddaughter of Abner Downs stood in need of a future. As if an Edward Elliott, for that matter, stood in such need after having achieved her and all for which she stood; future enough, surely, for any ambitious boy. Future was not in Lilla's vocabulary. She had her future now, she always had had, and she always would have—have it now; on the moment. She lived in the

now, Ned in the future. Which, she wondered drearily, was the most alone?

She faced a mirror panel in the long, white drawing room, dim-lined with tarnished gold; precisely as it had always been. Lilla's pioneer forbears, like many of the city builders of their turbulent age, had been, though adventurers, yet men of intellect and family; quality, as they used to say. Men of the highest traditions in architecture that America has yet known.

So benignant-featured Abner Downs, known as Sword of the Vigilantes of fifty-six, blood avenger of James King of William, had—after the episode of lynching sundry undesirable citizens and making San Francisco the best-governed city in the world for nine whole months, in defiance of State and Federal authority—built himself a flawless reproduction of a white Italian villa, to crown the long sweep of that street of millionaires and fellow adventurers. Long windowed, mirror-paneled, reticently columned, unflamboyant; beauty beautifully restrained. Perfect. So stood his great-granddaughter now and judged her own beauty against the restrained beauty of her background; compared it with the gorgeous ex-mannequin of Roselle's.

Her slim, rounded body, in one of those latest importations, showed mistily swathed in a clinging, diaphanous black, which spurted wings of still more tenuous flame. It clung all the way down to her tapering ankles, which gave to Lilla the contour of a tall and slender vase; and spoke the last word in mode. Her abundant dark hair clung close to her insolent young head. Her childishly slender arms, neck, and back betrayed their fine, underlying bones only by a glancing of dimples when she moved. The flame of her lips challenged the flames of her frock. Also, it challenged all male kind; the challenge Ned had taken up and now cast aside for the common, blond pulchri-

tude of any man's woman. Yet, Lilla coolly set down to the credit side of her beauty, other men went mad about her. The very unrest of these married years had lit a fire beneath her too-finished exterior which few men could pass by unscathed; or would.

With a lithe movement of her right arm she posed, her enormous, flame-colored fan of uncurled ostrich, screen-like, back of her high-poised head. Above its sprangling edge a masculine face appeared and smiled half-tentatively in the mirror. Its gray eyes met steadily the flashing blue of hers.

Lilla's breath stopped. For a moment it seemed that behind the flame of her fan stood the khaki-clad war hero of three years ago, whose passion had swept her across unbelievable barriers straight to his breast; along with other decorations, she reminded herself, just in time. She lowered her fan and her eyes, turning to face her husband casually. A brightness, as of romance, leaped into his equable gray regard.

"This is fine! 'Tisn't every poor bullyragged politician in the last week of his campaign who can come home to just my sort of wife."

"I've decided not to *remain* your wife," Lilla shot back at him coldly.

She sank tolerantly into a fifteenth-century ecclesiastical chair, her vivid head upright against its high, deeply carven back. There was a moment of intense quiet; as though the whole city were listening for his reply.

"The decision does not rest with you."

Characteristic of Ned, she thought bitterly; always ready with just the right words—simple, direct, definitive. That was one big factor in his cumulative success.

He drew up a modern easy-chair of his own purchasing and settled down opposite. His long legs and sturdy shoulders in their slaty-gray tweeds

threw the whole exquisite picture of his wife against her inherited background completely out of focus, Lilla recognized with overt rebellion. His head with its curved, thick, pale-brown hair above a square-cut brow showed too massive, measured by the fine-drawn lines of Abner Downs' Italian drawing-room. His straight nose loomed a bit blocky; his chin—with the muscles tensed, as now—appeared curiously square at the corners.

"I ask you to set me free."

"Not to marry Burt Ross."

Then he had not been so obtuse?

"Is that your only reason?"

He leaned forward, elbows on knees. "Would it do any good to remind you that I love you?" He waited. "Well, put it on the grounds of respectability. I can't let you marry Ross. I know him to the core. We went through Berkeley the same years. He's yellow."

"And you?—behind his back?"

"Why tell it to his face and start a scandal?"

"Which would disarrange your political plans? Nevertheless I begin suit to-morrow."

"On what grounds?"

"Why——" Lilla went so far as to glance astonishment, "just—just anything. Incompat——"

"Doesn't go in this State. Can't claim cruelty, even mental, for it has never occurred."

"It has."

"How? When? Lilla!"

She drew farther back. He controlled himself.

"Have to have witnesses." He ran rapidly over the remaining possibilities. "Failure to provide won't work. I've contributed to our household funds a monthly amount equivalent to the upkeep of an adequate small home, one servant and a car. Lilla! How happy we could be with just—that." He met the cool derision of her glance and went

steadfastly on, again impersonal. "There have been no other women in my life. I have not deserted you——"

"I'd imagined you might wish to move over to the Club——"

"This may be your house, but it is my home. Tell Ross I said so."

"You are jealous of Burt?"

"Impossible. But I saved you from him once and I'm going to do it again."

"I suppose," she jeered ever so delicately, "a divorce sensation just now would be bad for your primary election?"

"Fatal."

"I see. You care more for your election than for your wife."

"I haven't had a wife for so long that there is no basis for comparison. But Burt Ross shall not rob me of either, if he is plugging for the other side, politically." His voice grew wistful. "Why did it have to turn out like this? Lilla, we did love each other!"

"You admit the past tense. Why not, then, let me go?"

"Never! Until, at least, you get free of Burt Ross——"

"Or you get your election."

He tried again. She fought a certain tremor at the suppressed passion in his lowered tones.

"Lilla! Have you forgotten all we'd planned together? Some day there was to be——"

"No!" she flamed out violently. It was against this very, compelling sweetness of the strong, alien creature she had married that she most rebelled.

"You will not begin action to-morrow," he resumed practically. "No one of the Downs blood was ever known to start anything he could not finish."

"Suppose I get evidence."

"I dare you to!" He stood up, set his jaws, then laughed. "Sorry to disillusionize my ultramodern little wife, but I am not the least bit of a bad

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actor. I'm immune to all women but one—my wife."

"He dared say that to me," she told Ross the next day, to the murmur of the fountain at Tait's.

"He can't afford to lose you just now. The Legion and the west end of Pacific Avenue would throw him down. Roselle's girl will help along in the Tenderloin, but that is not enough. He's got to keep his society mannequin."

"Prove what you insinuate about the girl, and I will file my application at once."

"Done! A couple of plain-clothes men, a reporter, and it's done."

"Detectives!" She shrank, horrified, then stiffened. "Get the evidence. But I must have the final word about using it."

Ross called her up the second day before the election.

"We're on our way," significantly. "Slip into your togs. I'll drive around at once."

"All right. Half a sec."

Her hands trembled, her face turned white, but her teeth set firmly in a gleaming line.

"Up there, to the left," Ross timed his narration dramatically to its geography. He directed her glance up a quietly curving side road shaded by magnificent white oaks, which here debouched into the old Monterey Road, now El Camino Real, along which they sped. "Roseclad Inn."

"There!" She winced.

"There, to-night Ned entertains, in one of its upstairs dining rooms, his other—mannequin."

"It's a lie!"

"How about that dare? I've done my part. Are you going to welsh?"

Her eyes blazed.

"Where can I get you on the phone

if I decide for you to—to turn your dogs loose?"

"Nowhere. If it were to come out that I had unearthed the divorce evidence—well——"

"Whom shall I call?"

He gave her a penciled slip.

"I paid them a cash advance, in your name. My name is out of it. They don't even know me. But if they make the arrest——"

"Arrest!" appalled.

"Well——"

"Well?" grimly.

"You'll have a big bill to settle, to-night. Have cash. Checks are bad."

She looked down at her wrist. "I'll catch the first Interurban back, to reach the bank in time—and alone."

The penciled note arranged ten o'clock for the raid, including a newspaper man. About five she gave the word by telephone. A furtive voice warned her not to expect to hear much before eleven; from Police Headquarters; to protect her from suspicion of complicity.

Intolerable! Impossible! Dinner past, she knew she could not wait until eleven. She dressed all over again; this time as though for a ball. She donned a daring silver cloth, exaggerated by moonshiny tulle. She loaded her fingers with dinner rings. She opened the vault and scanned her store of jewels. Something significant; something to drive home to Ned's soul all that—aside from herself—he had lost; for that she searched.

She pulled out a quaint, long, old-fashioned leather case and sprung its time-darkened lock. Her great-grandmother's *rivière* of twenty-seven blue-white registered diamonds—matched, flawless, enormous in their aggregate of carats—flamed up at her. She had never worn the barbaric thing, but in its way it spelled history. She clasped

it about her neck. The fire of it got into her blood.

She looked at the clock. Only five minutes after nine; the raid not before ten.

Her impatience stung like a whip stroke across her bare white back. She thrust the big roll of green bills, of what separate denominations she had not the faintest idea, inside the bandeau of her gown.

Down the peninsula, along the Camino, Lilla spun at prison pace; her one thought, to be at the Inn when the trap should be sprung. Nothing was clear in her mind except that. When the plain-clothes men broke in on Ned she must see his face. She wanted him to see her. She wanted him to know that he had not been fooling her with his middle-class standards of morality, his unspoken criticism of her flirtatiousness; of her social laxity. He to refuse her proposal of divorce!—like a proposal of marriage.

She felt physically compact and tense, as though laced into the old-fashioned, long, high-busted corsets of her mother's day. There was a hard lump somewhere; in her breast it seemed. Perhaps it was the bills; perhaps it was her heart. Anyway, it was hard. Down the Camino they raced, passing other cars like dim, crawling ghosts. She must get there first. Ned must see her first; read in her face that she had not been fooled—was never again to be his mannequin; that she had personally brought upon him this total wreck of the great career to which he had sacrificed her, and was now sacrificing his soul's integrity. She must witness the infuriating kindness of those clever gray eyes transformed into craven cowardice. None but Lilla could bring that look. Lilla could; Lilla who had remained true to his middle-class standards while he lolled in road houses with common creatures

from modiste's shops. Common. That was what hurt.

His own course, she again mentally reviewed, though socially divergent from hers she had conceded; respected in her ironical manner, although it had carried him farther from her with every paltry step toward his middle-class success.

To be divorced, to be married again, that was in the game for both of them. She had offered it in all decency, if with delicate cynicism. This he had refused; dared her to get evidence against him. Oh—foolish! Through what filth of publicity must both now be dragged. Only a second marriage would sponge that contamination from Lilla's life; show Ned that he had not the power to wreck her happiness. Burt Ross, perhaps. She was in the mood not to care who. She had not at first intended so terrible a revenge: those headlines to-morrow morning; the smashing defeat at the primary; his total elimination from politics.

Ned would pay with his whole life for what he had done to her whole life.

She marveled at her own cruelty. Atavism, Burt pronounced it. A throwback to Abner Downs, that sweet-faced philanthropist of the eighties; Sword of the Vigilantes in fifty-six. It was in the blood of them all—all of to-day's waster descendants from the iron adventurers of three generations back; wasters, too, but who dealt out justice with no uncertain hand. She now was on her way to deal out justice, if also punishment and revenge and ruin. There was so extravagantly much in Ned's life to ruin.

Her narrow hands, in their long white gloves, clenched until the dinner ring cut splits in the satiny kid. Her right hand had the feeling of a revolver butt in its cramped palm. Why had she not thought of that? No. She was armed

with a deadlier weapon; one which would not kill——

Her chauffeur drew softly up to the vine-clad side veranda of the Inn. There were few cars about, Lilla noted as she reached the ground; a limousine or two, here and there a dashing run-about; all financially beyond dingy plain-clothes men or shabby reporters.

Unconsciously she raised the taupe collar of her sweeping caracal wrap, against her cheek; the suggestion of furtiveness which she recognized as strictly in keeping with the errand and the environment. The shadowy side door gave directly on—as Burt had informed her—the women's stairway; up which Lilla went with instinctively muffled, yet steady footfalls, arriving in a narrow, dimly lighted hall which showed many discreet doors:

She did not know the number of Edward's private dining room. She would get it from the maid. An open doorway located the dressing rooms. Lilla dropped her heavy fur wrap rakishly off one bare shoulder, tousled her hair and, a foolish grin on her lips, slipped in. She beckoned the darky maid with one of the bills from the bosom of her frock.

"Haf fix me up, li'l," she slurred. "M' hair."

"Yes, madame." The maid's brown fingers went deftly to work. Her opaque black eyes appraised the situation; her impudent mouth assumed respectful lines.

"D'ye know," Lilla confided, "I've f—forgotten m' husband's li'l room? M' husband's," with enormous gravity. And still the keen-eyed maid knew better than to take liberties.

"They's on'y but two upsta'hs rooms okkypied to-night, madame," the girl offered civilly. "One's a sho't, dahk gempmum——"

"S the other."

"This way, madame." Still respectfully knowing, she softly led Lilla

around a corner to where a sliver of light showed beneath a closed door, through which came the subdued vibration of Ned's unmistakable voice.

"You may go," she dismissed the maid.

Lilla had outraced the detectives and reporter, but they would surely arrive in a few minutes. Yes, a woman's voice inside. Lilla hungered for the sight of Ned's eyes in the moment of his unmasking. She had never yet refused herself a sensation. She set her teeth and—with the mechanical courtesy of domestic custom—gave a gentle rap.

As though on signal a woman's scream rang out; a sound of shuffling chairs. Lilla, entering, faced Ned seated at a table set for two, Roselle's gorgeous ex-mannequin clinging to his neck. Her heavy blond hair was in the act of rolling down, the left shoulder strap of her indecent dinner dress was hanging loose.

"Help! help!" the woman shrieked. Ned ceased to struggle and gazed steadily into his wife's eyes. As Lilla closed the door the girl looked around and stopped short, every feature arrested in its distorted gesture, mouth and spotted eyes spread wide. Lilla came brightly forward, reproving yet sympathetic.

"Open a window, Ned. She's faint. It's close in here. Cognac, too!" She gayly brandished a gold-bound flask of the familiar feminine type. She drew the girl back into her chair, poured water from the carafe, and held it to the open, painted lips. They closed automatically on the brim of the glass, but her eyes continued to stare roundly at Lilla across the top. Ned flung back the sash curtains and opened a window. He did not speak. He was ghastly white.

"I never could bear a closed window," Lilla prattled genially on, touching the bell for a waiter and

swiftly recoiling the girl's long, yellow hair. She found the silver hairpin on the floor. She fastened the shoulder strap by means of a rhinestone bar from the front of the girl's disordered corsage; opened her vanity box, passed her powder puff over her face, and seated herself on a narrow divan—all by the time the waiter appeared.

"Two more services and chairs," she ordered, tucking a bill into his palm, "two waiters," another bill, "in *two minutes!*" Two more bills came into action and brought action.

Neither Ned nor the girl had yet spoken. Lilla blithely rearranged his loosened tie and rumpled hair before the genie-return of the waiters, both of whom she retained to serve.

"Sorry I was late," she chatted over her supper, "car went dead. I suppose you gave up expecting me?"

"Oh," Ned's voice was grim as he apportioned another spoonful of hot Newburg to the watchful girl, which she obediently began to eat, "you got here on the dot."

Lilla kept up the chatter until there came a second tap at the door, like a signal. Two dingy men and a third seedy, clever-looking chap, obviously the reporter, burst in, to stand transfixed, gazing at a table set for four and occupied by three people on apparently the best of terms, with two waiters in attendance.

"Were you looking for O'Brien?" Ned addressed the cleverish chap, whom he appeared to recognize. "I had an appointment with him here, myself; but he can't come until later. He sent Mrs. O'Brien," indicating the girl, "to ask me to wait."

The wraith of Abner Downs, that archpolitician of the fifties, sat straight up in the soul of his great-granddaughter and took notice. So Burt Ross was, yellow. He had been framing Ned—and her.

"For me," she remarked tranquilly to everybody, "I don't believe he'll materialize at all. It's hardly worth while to wait."

"You may give out," Ned announced journalistically to the reporter, "that Mr. O'Brien and I, this afternoon, came to a virtual understanding and are working in harmony."

The men still waited, eyes on Lilla, whom they did not seem able to place. She nodded reassuringly at the mute, wide-eyed girl across the table.

"I really am afraid Mr. O'Brien won't be here in time to take you home. Oh, these politicians!" She sparkled her eyes and her rings at the goggling intruders. "Very soon after I became—Mrs. Edward Elliott—I discovered what politics can do to the social amenities." One man's throat moved up and down as though something choked him. The girl came to life.

"I for one shan't wait another minute," she proclaimed, rising. Ned sprang to hold her cloak. As she plunged into its gold-brocaded folds she suggested, "If you gentlemen are going in to town—"

"Happy to take you along," chirped the reporter.

After Ned had closed the door on the crew and the waiters he stood looking down at Lilla; the effect was that of looking up.

"Why did you do it?"

Lilla's head went high. "While you remain my husband you are not to be dragged through the slime."

"Did you believe in the slime?"

The passion of her wild drive down the peninsula again raced through every fiber of heart, soul, and body.

"I believed all that was slimiest—in me. I followed to crush you; ruin your career; thrust you out of my life and all decency forever. I knew who was with you. But when I saw you in that creature's arms—" She set

her small teeth furiously. "You were my husband! *She should not have you!*"

He caught her, fighting, and kissed those little, shining teeth.

"What business had you mixing up in such political muck?"

A retrospective grin developed entrancingly about her suddenly adorable mouth corners.

"You can never again pry me loose from your old politics. I haven't got such a kick out of anything since——"

He shook her until all the little rainbows darted out from great-grandmother's *rivière* to dazzle him with hope.

"You were—*jealous!*"

"Oo-oo"—she cooed, nestling closer—"simply homicidal!"



THE NUMBERED HOURS

THE hours are numbered since I saw your face,
The hours are many since I clasped your hand,
And walked with you to some sequestered place
Among the cedars in the mountain land.

The hours are numbered since I met your eyes,
The hours are laggard and the hours are long,
Since we together saw the round moon rise,
And heard the wood thrush in its twilight song.

The hours are numbered since I knew your kiss,
Where deep the shadows of the maples fell;
The hours are weary since I felt the bliss
Of your fond arms—oh, joy ineffable!

Then be ye fleet, ye Numbered Hours, to wane,
For I would end this parting, which is pain!

CLINTON SCOLLARD.



Kings of Hearts

By Anice Terhune

"Handsome Jack" Churchill:

The Penniless Lad Who Became a Duke

IN an upper room of a palace, a pair of lovers stood clasped in each other's arms. Sounds of gay laughter rose from the courtyard far below, where palace attendants were enjoying the cool of the evening; but the silken curtains of the boudoir window were carefully drawn to keep out prying eyes.

Suddenly, into this indiscreet Eden burst a panic-stricken servant.

"The king!" she whispered quickly. "Saints preserve us! The king is here!"

Steps were heard in the corridor. Then began a hammering at the door.

With eyes full of stark fear, the beautiful woman stood perfectly still, and gazed, speechless, at her lover, as the knob of the door began to turn. Her fortune and his—their liberties and perhaps their lives—wavered, just then, in a perilous balance. The woman, in face of this awful crisis, was panic-stricken and helpless. The man was not. It was a life-and-death moment.

Gayly he tossed his life into the game. With a gallant, reassuring smile, he bent over her trembling hand. Then, wheeling about, he sprang lightly

through the open upper window, and out into space. No, he was not risking his neck in a quixotic effort to save the good name of the woman he loved. Her good name meant nothing to him. The only thing he cared about, then—almost the only thing he ever cared about—was his own advancement. For this, and not through chivalry, he was shaking dice with death.

He was Jack Churchill, a young down-at-heel adventurer; brilliant, good-tempered, conscienceless and greedy; who was destined later to become the first Duke of Marlborough, and England's national hero.

The sweetheart whose reputation he had just saved at the imminent risk of his own neck, was Betty Castlemaine, reigning favorite of King Charles II.

As Charles entered the boudoir, he saw only a flutter of silken curtains, presumably caused by the night breeze. On a couch lay Betty, dozing.

The king, who was not easily fooled, noticed her tight-clenched hands, and her quick breathing; but the door had held just a second too long. There was nothing to be done. Betty, undeniably, was quite alone and indulging

in a nap, fanned by soft breezes. Nevertheless, the king thought it wise to banish young Churchill to Tangier, in order to cure him of the window-jumping habit.

The fair Castlemaine was so grateful to her lover for saving the flimsy shreds of what she was pleased to call her reputation, that she smuggled twenty-five thousand dollars to him, which she had first squeezed out of the king, and which he, in turn, had squeezed out of the royal treasury. Churchill accepted the twenty-five thousand dollars without the slightest hesitation. With equal promptitude and wisdom he invested it at ten per cent. It was the foundation of the boundless Marlborough fortune which, under Churchill's magic touch—"touch" is the right word—grew into unbelievable figures. The sum remained undiminished for more than a century.

But let us get back to Jack.

On his father's side the family came in with William the Conqueror. On his mother's side he was related to Sir Francis Drake. Sir Winston Churchill, the boy's father, lost all he possessed in fighting for King Charles I. So, when little John was born—on Midsummer Day, 1650—his coming caused no stir in the world.

The family lived in a small manor house, in Devonshire; and there John spent his early years. His education was shamefully neglected; and he was allowed to run wild a good bit of the time. He was always playing pranks. Yet he found a chance to dream military dreams—dreams that were to be more than realized later on.

From the first his handsome face, his winning manner, and his unflinching good nature won him friends wherever he went.

When he was fifteen he was sent to visit his sister, Arabella, who was maid of honor to the Duchess of York. Arabella was quick to see the sensation

her fascinating young brother created, and she resolved to make the most of it. She herself was not blessed with good looks. Grammont calls her "an ugly skeleton." But she was a favorite of James, Duke of York, who was famous for his scrawny-featured sirens. His brother Charles used to say:

"James' sweethearts are chosen by his confessors as a penance."

At any rate, whatever else she was, Arabella was a good sister; for she contrived to bring about a meeting between the duke and her brother John.

James was charmed with the boy.

"What, most of all things, do you wish for?" he asked kindly.

"Now that I have seen your grace," answered the youthful diplomat, falling on his knees, "I have but one wish left in the world—a pair of colors in your Guards!"

Needless to say, he soon got them.

This was a good start. "Handsome Jack" proceeded to follow it up by turning the heads of all the women at court. Young as he was, he speedily found himself with a score of love affairs on his hands. All around him were gallants who were spending every penny they could raise to buy costly presents that should win them the smiles of girls whom they admired. Churchill prudently adopted just the opposite plan of action. The woman who expected to be seen in his company or to be singled out by him for any sort of attention was obliged to pay well, in hard cash, for the privilege.

"His stature was commanding," says Macaulay; "his face handsome, his address singularly winning, yet of such dignity that the most impertinent fop never dared to take liberties with him. His temper, even in the most vexatious and irritating circumstances, was always under perfect command. He could not spell the most common words of his own language; but brilliancy supplied the lack of book learning.

"He was not talkative; but when he was forced to speak in public, his natural eloquence moved the envy of practiced orators. His courage was singularly cool and imperturbable."

With all these good qualities he was thoroughly heartless, without conscience, and avaricious to a degree. Just one bright exception appears to contradict the stories of his love-for-revenue-only, at this time.

A woman at court—whose name is not recorded—became so infatuated with the boy that she gave him a bag containing forty gold pieces. He took it, alas, yes!—or he would not have been Handsome Jack—but for some strange reason he never put the money out at interest, as was his usual procedure, or spent it in any other way. He kept it in the little old bag, year after year, untouched. And so it remained, through all the glittering era of his success and the period of his black downfall. After his death, it was found among his effects—still untouched.

One of his first affairs was with Louise de Querouailles—afterward Duchess of Portsmouth—the baby-faced super-woman who, you remember, first enchanted Louis XIV. and was then sent, by him, to the English court to act as cat's-paw for the French king.

Charles II. proved an easy mark for Louise, as Louis had known he would. But, while their intrigue was in full swing, Louise met Jack Churchill. At once she fell a victim to his spell. The young adventurer snatched her away from the king, and a whirlwind love affair flared up under the very nose of the unsuspecting Charles.

Like all of Churchill's sweethearts, Louise had to pay, in good English coin, for the privilege of winning him. She also made him presents of valuable jewelry, among which was a wonderful diamond cross.

Though Handsome Jack had stolen the little French beauty from

two kings, which in itself was no small achievement, he soon tired of her love.

Seemingly, Churchill was irresistible. All women went mad over him. His affairs of the heart tumbled one over the other with such startling rapidity that there is not space to touch upon the majority of them.

Even cold, hard-headed Frances Stuart—another of Charles' favorites—threw herself abjectly at Churchill's feet. The boy carried on an intrigue with her which lasted until the Duke of Richmond came along and dazzled Frances with his splendid estates. Before she was quite ready to let Churchill go, Jack had tired of her. So, wisely, she married Richmond.

Another Frances—Frances Jennings, court beauty and vivacious maid of honor to the Duchess of York, consented to be dragged at Churchill's triumphant chariot wheel for a time.

This brings us, by easy stages, to the beginning of Handsome Jack's affair with Betty Castlemaine.

Betty's own career had been starred with intrigues from the time she was sixteen. As each attachment burned itself out, Betty climbed over the smoldering ashes and raised herself a bit in the world, until, at last, by standing on tiptoe, she reached Charles II. She had twisted the susceptible king around her little finger. For years thereafter she was uncrowned queen of England, though the couple quarreled frequently and furiously. They parted, only to become reconciled again.

One of these lovers' quarrels lasted rather longer than usual, and Betty had just about decided to patch matters up, when, by chance, she caught a glimpse of Jack Churchill. He was years younger than she, and just on the threshold of life, while her beauty was already beginning to fade; but she fell wildly in love with him.

She loaded the boy with money and jewels. She threw common sense to the

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winds. But she could not throw caution after it, as her position was already rocking uneasily. She had court fortunes to lose; he had court fortunes to make. So the affair flourished with great secrecy. And the king, supposedly, was kept in complete ignorance of what was going on.

Meanwhile, the Duke of Buckingham, who had quarreled bitterly with Betty and had an old score to pay off, bribed one of her servants to let him know when next the two should meet. Then he whispered a word or two in the king's ear.

Charles was insanely jealous of Betty. He resolved to lay a trap for the lovers, and find out for himself how matters stood. He announced that he was going away for several days to hunt. Then he stole into Betty's apartments to do his hunting—with the result I have already told you. Buckingham's plot was spoiled, and Churchill escaped from his leap into the courtyard with a few bruises.

Though Jack was banished to Tangier for three years, and Betty schemed frantically to reinstate herself with Charles, Churchill continued to rule her heart.

Charles made her Duchess of Cleveland; yet she loved only Churchill. Her gratitude to him was unbounded, for the breakneck leap he had taken. She never stopped to think that in saving her reputation he was saving his own. For ten years their attachment lasted, and when at last the ties that bound them together were broken, it was, needless to say, Churchill who broke them. But we will come to that later.

During the three years he was in Tangier, the duchess employed secret agents to watch his every move. At the first symptom of a flirtation she deluged him with letters of bitter reproach, and with denunciations of his ingratitude to her for the fortune she had given him. She clung to him with

every art she could conjure. Meanwhile he kept on breaking hearts, fighting gallant battles, and winning promotion.

On his return to England, in 1672, the duchess claimed him again; so Charles thought it prudent to send him over to France to help Louis XIV. fight the Dutch. Here he more than made good. His genius for military matters, his bravery, shrewdness, and wit, and his power over men were apparent almost at once. He attracted the attention of Turenne, commander of the French army.

One night, news was brought that a certain lieutenant colonel had quit his post at sight of the enemy.

"I'll wager twelve bottles of my best wine," cried Turenne, "that that handsome Englishman, Churchill, would regain the position, with half the number of men!"

Churchill, with a mere handful of men, but with unbounded enthusiasm, rushed the enemy, won back the position and a bunch of prisoners, and incidentally won Turenne's wager for him.

Again, he scaled the wall of a besieged town, and planted the French colors on the battlements. For this he was rewarded in person by the French king. In return for the honor he deftly stole away the heart of Louis' favorite, Madame de Montespan, who gave him a diamond star and showered other jewels as well as gold upon him with a lavish hand.

Then there is a story in an unpleasant key, about a little French milliner who worshiped at his shrine, and whom he deserted after she had given him all the savings of her lifetime. But I prefer not to dwell on that.

Handsome Jack returned from France a colonel. He had saved the life of the Duke of Monmouth at Maestricht, and covered himself with

glory. He became a popular idol; and all his peccadillos were forgotten. He was more fascinating than ever.

His family now decided it was time for him to settle down and marry. More than that, they had a bride all picked out for him. She was Catherine Sedley, a very wealthy kinswoman of the Churchills, who adored him and was only waiting to fall into his arms. Jack was not in the least in love with Catherine; but her substantial fortune made her well worth consideration by the avaricious young colonel.

Then, just as matters hung in the balance, Churchill met little Sarah Jennings, the younger sister of his former sweetheart, Frances.

For the first and only time in his life he fell violently and irrevocably in love.

Sarah was less regularly beautiful than her sister, but she was radiantly lovely; just on the verge of womanhood; dainty, graceful, and bewitching. At twelve years of age she had been whisked away from her father's estate in Hertfordshire to become the playmate of the Duke of York's shy, backward daughter, Anne. The healthy country girl was a vivacious, strong-willed, jolly romp. To the timid, clinging Anne she was a revelation. Before long the mental tie between them was so strong that the future queen became Sarah's slave. This was the beginning of a bond that, later on, made Sarah Duchess of Marlborough and virtual Queen of England, though Anne actually wore the crown.

From the moment Churchill met Sarah she fascinated him as no other woman ever had. Her dazzling eyes, her wit, her unfathomable manner, forged a chain which he was proud to wear to the end of his life. She was the first woman who had known how to resist him. Her seeming coldness and indifference only increased his love for her, and kept him in a ferment of

uncertainty. For months she played cat and mouse with him.

Churchill's father, in desperation, started the report that his son was engaged to the angular-featured Miss Sedley. When the rumor reached Sarah's ears she flew into a towering rage and denounced him as the basest and falsest of mankind.

This brought Churchill groveling to her feet.

"I vow to God," he wrote her, "you do so entirely possess my thoughts that I think of nothing else in this world but your dear self. I do not, by all that is good, say this because I think it will move you to pity me, for I despair of your love; but it is to let you see how unjust you are to me, and that I must ever love you so long as you have breath."

After this outburst Sarah relented a little.

"If I was sure that you have the passion for me that you say you have," she wrote, "you would find some way to make yourself happy. *It is in your power!*"

The next day, full of hope, Churchill went to the Duchess of York's drawing room, hoping to clinch matters. As he entered the room, Sarah left it, saucily remarking as she passed him:

"I'm going, so that I may be free from hearing you talk!"

For a while longer, she continued to torture him; but she was clever enough to see that at last his forbearance was nearing the breaking point. So, one day when he called, after having sent down the curt message, "Miss Jennings declines to see you," she tiptoed into the room unnoticed by him.

Her handsome lover was standing with his back to her, his head bent in dejection. Stealing up behind him, she put her arm around his neck and whispered that she had loved him from the first, and was sorry she had been unkind.

Churchill was crazily happy. He must indeed have worshiped Sarah, to have thrown over the rich Miss Sedley for a girl who had not a penny. The world thought him mad; but it is more than likely that his wonderful insight gave him a glimpse at the future, when he and Sarah might rule England through the pliable hands of Anne. However that may be, the engagement became the topic of the court.

When Betty, Duchess of Cleveland, heard the news, she was wild with rage. She accused Sarah's mother of stealing Churchill for her daughter on the strength of the prediction of a fortune teller—this fortune teller had prophesied to Mrs. Jennings that her daughter "would marry a soldier, who should be the greatest of his age."

The time-scarred duchess waged war on the dainty, wild-rose girl in every way. She threw herself at Churchill's feet and clung there in despair. He was at his wit's end to know how to shake her off. Finally he hit upon a plan.

Among his acquaintances was a man who looked much like him. Churchill could charm a bird out of its nest, if he so willed, and at last he prevailed upon the reluctant youth to impersonate him in a rendezvous he had already arranged with Betty. The meeting place was a little villa owned by the duchess, where the two had often met in earlier times to escape the vigilant eyes of the king's watchers.

Betty—blind to everything except the fact that Churchill had agreed to meet her once more—failed, in the darkness, to detect that the man was not her lover.

As she threw herself sobbing into the stranger's arms Churchill broke in upon them. In coldest, most cutting manner, he denounced her as false, and refused to have anything more to do with her. In spite of her tears, the affair ended then and there.

Mrs. Mauley tells how, twenty-five years later, when the duchess had squandered the huge fortune Charles had left her, in gaming and in ruinous speculations, the former lovers met for the last time.

It was at a card party, and the duchess had lost the last shilling of her annuity. Churchill, then Duke of Marlborough, held the bank. With a gambler's belief that one more stake must change the luck, Betty turned to him imploringly, and begged the loan of half a crown.

"Madame," he answered, fixing his smilingly relentless eyes full upon her, "the bank never lends money."

She fell back in her chair, pressed her hand to her heart, and, with a look that moved every one at the table to pity, rose and faltered from the room with feeble, tottering steps. From then on she drooped to her death. Her lavish gifts to the ingrate in days gone by had soared far past the hundred-thousand-dollar mark. She had risked life and favor for him. And, in her extremity, he refused her the loan of half a crown. I think this incident tells more of Jack Churchill's true character than do all the history books combined.

Sarah and Churchill were married in 1678. From then on their rise in the world was rapid. Both were tremendously ambitious, both were clever, both conscienceless. They were an unbeatable pair.

When James II. was made king their fortunes increased with a bound. Handsome Jack was now Lord Churchill of Eyemouth. A few months later he became major general.

He used his wife's tremendous power over Princess Anne to shake the most tempting plums available into the Churchill lap, and more than justified the royal favor showered upon him by his increasingly-brilliant military record.

When Anne came to the throne Sarah

and Churchill were the uncrowned, but none the less real rulers of England.

After the battle of Blenheim Jack was made Duke of Marlborough. Wealth and honors were heaped high before him. Much of his success he owed to his marvelous skill as a soldier and statesman; but more, perhaps, he owed indirectly to his marriage and to his wonderful power as a heart-breaker.

For years the Marlboroughs carried all before them. Then, one day, the glittering edifice of power they had so carefully raised crashed to the ground—knocked over by a pair of flimsy white gloves.

This is how it happened:

Sarah had installed a relative of hers, Mrs. Masham, in attendance on the queen. Mrs. Masham was jealous of Sarah—as poor relations whom one helps are apt to be. So she resolved to undermine Sarah's influence.

Anne, whose devotion to Sarah never flagged, refused to believe a word against her. As proof that Sarah was only using Anne as a tool, and had no real love for her, Mrs. Masham arranged a trap.

The queen was secreted behind a screen as Sarah passed through a corridor on the way for a drive. Mrs. Masham handed her her gloves; then cried:

"I've brought you her Majesty's gloves instead of your own!"

Instantly Sarah began to tear them off, crying in disgust:

"How dare you suppose that I would touch that odious creature's gloves!"

The queen wept heartbrokenly, when she learned how she was really regarded by her beloved Sarah. And the Marlborough reign at court ended then and there.

Soon they left England. On the Continent Marlborough was received with royal honors. After Anne died the pair returned to England; but their star never shone with the same radiance again. In 1722 the duke died. Sarah never failed in her devotion to him, though for forty-four years the hero of Blenheim was ruled by her tiger temper. After his death she had many offers of marriage, but remained true to Handsome Jack's memory.

"If you were emperor of the world," she said to one suitor, "I would not permit you to succeed in that heart which has been devoted to John, Duke of Marlborough."

Greatest general of his day, greatest heartbreaker of his age, he had filled the world with his memory.

England felt a bit ashamed of the way she had used him in his latter years. Therefore, a magnificent funeral was accorded him. All ranks and all parties were represented. The coffin was flanked by shields, typifying the battles he had fought and won. He had served under four monarchs. He had been faithful to none of them. But the four had profited vastly by his genius.

All women who saw him worshiped him. Yet Sarah, among the multitude of his sweethearts, was the only one of them he loved, the only one to whom he was faithful.



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The Perfect Porcelain

By Ernest L. Starr

Author of "From Out the Open," etc.



WHEN you reach Barbados, on the way up from Buenos Aires to New York, your boat doesn't tie up at a pier. You drop a leisurely anchor some hundred yards from shore, and await your turn into one of the innumerable punts which swarm alongside, with their smiling negro boatmen bidding for the opportunity of carrying you ashore.

Meanwhile, you look out upon that marvelous coast which gleams like a woman's curving arm, and thank God that your arc of adventure is drawn through the Caribbean Sea and exactly cleaves the port of Bridgetown.

Captains call it a coaling station, but you know it is a dreaming sort of interlude, an oasis in an ocean. It comes up over your horizon after fifteen days of the South Atlantic, always hotter as you plow your way up across the equator. From Barbados on one feels with increasing force the imperious power of the winds and waves, the cooling days and colder nights—the urge that has come into the air.

Barbados is like a turning point in the life of the *voyageur*. Up from Buenos Aires there is warmth and lassitude; but from Barbados on, a cool, clear vision. Yet this is a distinction

which cannot be made until one has left this beautiful island.

Haughton and Mrs. Nevil came ashore in different punts, separated by the eager rush of passengers down the ship's ladder. They had been counting the hours, anticipating this day and night in Bridgetown more keenly than either had outwardly acknowledged. Nevertheless, Haughton missed half the joy of that first close sight of Barbados—for looking at Jeanne Nevil.

She was in the boat ahead, facing him. Her dark eyes held him as completely as if she were an earth mother fluttering above him, lifting him up to her with undeniable arms. Her gaze moved on to the ship o' dreams slipping away behind them, and then to the open ocean rolling torridly back to Rio and Buenos Aires.

The punts raced on to the shore, and Barbados opened its heart to them, for Bridgetown is its very heart. Houses grew tall. Streets became wide and vastly animated. Old-fashioned carriages stood waiting behind undersized native horses. The crowds became focused into black and white, with black largely predominating. Multicolored shop fronts smiled their welcome of another ship day.

Ship days came oftener than ever now, and flags of the states and the empire were often stretched simultaneously in Bridgetown harbor. The *Vasari* was the largest of the regular visitants; her day meant big business and good times. Only one other ship day surpassed it. That was when her sister ship, the *Vestris*, met her there, one boat northbound, the other southbound, both discharging their loads of passengers for the twenty-four-hour interlude on the island.

Haughton stood quite still in the entrance to Bradley's Curio and Antique Place, and let his fellow passengers hurry on to monopolize whatever the Marine Hotel had to offer. It is a way with us Americans, to drive like mad in order to be first in line before a hotel clerk whose only interest in life is one's advance reservation. He had wirelessly ahead for their rooms, and his reservation had been confirmed. Yet, to make assurance certain, he called a barefooted negro from the crowd and said:

"How fast can you run?"

"I can beat a horse," the answer came, in the broad-voweled speech of the island.

"Then beat those people to the hotel, and give this card to the manager."

"I sure can do it, sir," and the negro was off.

Haughton watched Mrs. Nevil drive away in a carriage with the wife of the ambassador to the Argentine, then turned leisurely into Bradley's. There is always leisure if one plans ahead for it. The ease with which Haughton accomplished things was generally due to ironing out the unnecessary difficulties of a situation before it actually arose.

The ambassador's wife had been just solicitous enough on the way up to become a delightful nuisance. Charming, aristocratic old ladies can never admit the thought that they are nuisances, especially when they have been deferred

to as this dear lady had for six long, Argentine years. Haughton knew that he would very likely have given himself away in her august presence, for his heart was full to-day; and the ambassador's lady possessed a perfectly unpunctured fund of New England propriety.

Bradley's was one of his reasons for coming to Barbados. Mr. Bradley's books on West Indian marquetry were known wherever fine workmanship in inlaid woods was valued. A few explanations, he thought, were lacking. He looked forward to requesting them in person whenever he should meet this odd citizen of a secluded world.

He was directed to a glassed-in office back in the store. There he found Mr. Bradley bargaining with a six-foot negro fisherman for the possession of three great, perfect tortoise shells. Other people were waiting to see him, so Haughton contented himself with sending in word that he would come back later.

Passing out, he stopped to examine a collection of combs of exquisite, amber-tinted shell. One he sent up to Mrs. Nevil. Its fan-shaped spread was studded with a mass of iridescent seed pearls. He denied himself the pleasure of looking through Bradley's larger collections. These he would see under the owner's eye. Besides, there was a duty to perform.

He did not much want to do it, but as it was customary and courteous, there was no help for it. He took an ancient carriage and headed for Government House.

Somehow, it was an infinite relief to learn, upon arriving at Government House, that Carvardon was not on the island. It meant that Haughton would lose no time from Jeanne, and that no invitations would have to be fitted in with his inclinations. A deputy sort of person extended the courtesy of the commonwealth; put it in writing, in

fact, on the big, square card reserved for distinguished visitors. It was one of those "Be it known to all people" things, crested and imposing. It wasn't nearly so bad as having the freedom of a city extended to you in the shape of a chain of roses around your neck, which had happened to Haughton in at least two South American capitals. He pocketed the "Be it known" affair with perfect solemnity, wondering, meanwhile, what the devil he would do with it.

He took a longer route back to Bradley's, driving slowly down a shady street, wishing Jeanne were with him to see these pink and salmon-colored cottages with their bright-green, latticed windows. There came a vivid memory of Jeanne's face, with that imperious little smile on her lips.

From the entrance of the store he could see Bradley back in the office, but he was not aware, until very near, that there was some one with him. Facing Bradley, with her back partly to Haughton, was a woman, her heavy veil drawn aside. On the table between them was an exquisite piece of Bohemian glass. The sale was consummated, and the vase took its place on the shelf, completing Bradley's purchases for the day.

As the woman turned, Haughton caught an arresting glimpse of her face, fine and beautiful and faded. Bradley opened the door and bowed her out. She was impenetrably veiled when she passed Haughton, but the line of her shoulders and the dignity of her carriage somehow suggested a presentation at the court of St. James or a promenade in an imperial ballroom. It accentuated the feeling of tradition and tragedy which Barbados was already weaving over him.

Bradley looked him over thoughtfully.

"A pleasure and an honor, Mr. Haughton," he said. "Come in."

He took down two books and put them on the table. Both were by John Fleming Haughton. One was heavy with authoritativeness. Its title was "Stress and Understructure in Excavations." The other, not so thick, was bound in rose and gold. Its title was "Porcelains."

"I am amazed, Mr. Haughton, that one man could say the last word on two subjects so far afield. Lord Carvardon has told me that the Chelsea section of our tube in London wouldn't have been built if you had not proved that they could dig under our heaviest buildings with safety."

Haughton protested. He had not come to hear this.

"He says, too," Bradley went on, "that your confidence made tunneling the Meuse a fact, and turned that danger into victory. Yet here"—he took up the book on "Porcelains," handling it devotedly—"is the most exquisite lot of appreciations in the whole field of art. How did you do both?"

"I suppose it's like caring for boxing and babies," Haughton answered. "Everybody has two sides. Marcus Aurelius didn't always meditate. But you are spoiling my afternoon, Mr. Bradley. It is *your* work I want to talk about."

Bradley's deep-set eyes, which were made to twinkle inordinately, were solemn. He rose, holding his gray head high, as if at salute.

"My country thanked you, and so, no doubt, has your own, yet you must let me add my own word of appreciation."

Haughton liked this gray old man without knowing why.

"Every one gave all he had, you know," he said. He stood very straight. He was tall and brown and comely. He held out his hand with the disarming smile which always made him friends.

"Yet of the two," said Bradley, letting the leaves of "Porcelains" slip

gently over his thumb, "I'd a thousand times rather have this. Your Fourth Dynasty stuff is remarkable." His eyes were bright with the true collector's fire. "You've missed nothing, least of all the pottery of porcelains. Your interpretation of the potter's prayer for the Emperor Kwang-si is quite the most——"

Then all of a sudden he became English, meticulous, fearing the extravagant phrase. So he opened the book and read the passage through in silence.

"I've lived here all my life," he said. "These islands are all my world. They have taught me what I know of beauty. They have trained my powers of appreciation, because they are kindly and beautiful themselves. So I wonder: why dig into the earth and move about beneath it when there's so much of beauty on its surface and above it?"

"For speed," Haughton replied.

"We can get along without it."

"Then for utility. Much that we need comes out of it."

"Much more that we need—and love—goes into it."

Haughton saw the shadow of a far-away dream in the older man's eyes, and was silent.

"It is the perfect end," said Bradley gently; "perfect because it rounds out the circle of hope and work. Whatever makes one's progress toward it finer—and happier is very worth while. That's why I love your 'Porcelains.' But you must not think that I under-value your better-known accomplishment."

"It brought me success," Haughton said.

"But the other brought you happiness?"

"Both did that," Haughton replied quickly, surprised at the way the question cut into his consciousness.

"Yet only one was the happiness of appreciation."

"Not at all, Mr. Bradley. Tunnels

give me drama; porcelains, romance. I enjoy both."

Bradley knew Haughton only through his work, work which was the definite commitment of his soul. Nothing else of revelation or reserve was necessary. It was impossible to resent his appraisal because, after all, it was what any one who knew the work could say. No one else ever had, but there was no one else quite like Bradley.

"Stick to your porcelains, Mr. Haughton, and remember that the expression of such appreciation is the finest type of creation—re-creation."

Whereupon Mr. Bradley turned away as if he expected no answer; nor did he receive any.

Bradley opened a marquetry desk of many compartments, and soon Haughton had the information he sought—something about the use of tortoise shell in West Indian marquetry, whether the native workers had gotten the idea from Boule, that master of marquetry, or developed it themselves.

"They didn't need Boule," laughed Bradley. "No more than I need to go beyond my islands for the finest antiques in the world. Let me show you."

There they were—case after case of silver and glass, gold and filigree, rose-wood and mother of pearl; chests, tables, and desks of marquetry, rare specimens which many a museum would welcome.

"Stick to your porcelains," Haughton was thinking, as he followed Mr. Bradley around the place.

Was this the answer? Could one side of him alone bring him to that perfect something which he had always sought—that something which drew him on like a gorgeous-voiced Magnificat in the distance? Why he was searching, what the grail—he did not need to question. He would know when he came to the end—and be glad.

"So you found all this in the islands?" Haughton said perfunctorily.

"Not this stuff," Bradley replied, with a touch of impatience. They had reached the front of the store and were in the midst of cases of beads, rings, and scarabs. "This is for the tourists. It comes from Attleboro, Massachusetts, often on the same boat with them, bushels of it. But the real things, yes, I found them all here. Are you surprised?"

Then Bradley told him the story of Barbados during those dark years prior to the war, when the country was ruined through the failure of its only industry, and its best people had to sell everything they had just to make this thing of living easier. It accounted for the majority of Bradley's treasures. Haughton heard only parts of the story, because his heart had winged its way out to a caravansary of romance, locally known, it is true, as the Marine Hotel, and there it waited for him in keeping of some one who moved impatiently about a high-ceiled room and hurried to the curtains whenever a carriage came up the drive.

In the midst of his half listening, half dreaming, came a message from Jeanne Nevil. Bradley, at the moment, was saying something about the veiled woman who had gone out of his office when Haughton entered—something about her being one of those who had lost everything, family scattered, an assumed name for pride's sake, and all that. Haughton was sorry with the general sort of commiseration one feels for a stranger, untuned to any experience or desire of his own.

He turned the note over in his hands. He had received only one other note from Jeanne. That was in Buenos Aires, weeks before. It told him very simply that she would go back to New York on the *Vasari* with him. He could not yet assure himself that he knew her thought, nor the reaches which a nature like hers could compass. He was not yet ready to admit the eloquence of

those spaces of silence on the deck, when they had lain so close and still looking out together at the distance, feeling for a horizon which they could not see. Perhaps he feared the end of his trail. Men do that when they have been searching long and far. Sometimes the search itself is the joy, though few will say so till long after it has ended.

Just a line it was, done with a hand that flowed in dominant curves.

"I want you. Come, please."

He could have sworn the "please" was an afterthought. What difference did it make? She knew there would be no answer except his coming. This time he had no eyes for the picture-book prettiness of the streets. The wide-doored shops, with their colored salesgirls invited him unavailingly. Swarms of hucksters, all women, with baskets of wares balanced skillfully on their heads, merely delayed him. Their suave voices, telling him of their bead and coral treasures, were a bit more arresting.

"Buy these chains, sir? The beads are genuine 'tears of Job,' sir," said a woman, close to the side of his slow-moving carriage.

Haughton took a pocketful in order to be rid of her. She was a mulatto, with straight, brown hair, and a smile that told her story. She leaned close and murmured:

"You'll be coming down to-night, sir. Maybe I'll see you then."

Haughton ordered his driver to go on more quickly.

"They all do on ship days," the woman called softly after him, with that ageless smile on her lips.

At length, with a grand whirl of the driver's whip and a satisfied clumping of the small horse's hoofs, the Marine Hotel—two storied and angular, most animated to-day because the ship folk had discovered the inner meaning of the Barbados green swizzle.

With his key Haughton was given a card. Again the flowing, dominant lines.

"Mrs. Hammond is with me," it said.

Then Haughton did a little piece of thinking which he was going to look back to the rest of his life. It was more of impulsive intuition than reason. He called a servant and followed him to the room assigned. Bidding the man wait, he entered alone and stood quite still in the center of the great, white chamber.

Jeanne's voice came through the closed door that led into the adjoining room, clear and satisfying. There was a rare joy in hearing it again. He felt as if he had been away from her an unconscionably long time. He wanted to come close to her again and tell her what it meant to him.

Then he heard Mrs. Hammond, speaking with the voice of authority, as always. It seemed too bad that a perfectly charming president of the woman's club in some nice Massachusetts town, a dame, descendant of a signer, and the rest of it, should have been so effectively spoiled by her husband's becoming an ambassador.

Jeanne's voice came again, flowing smoothly into his heart. Hearing the quality of it rather than the phrases it clothed, he looked around the room so satisfyingly bare, with its homespun rug of a drowsy gray; deep chairs; the high, wide bed hung with white, its curtains drawn back invitingly, the tufted coverlet turned down for the night.

Haughton closed his eyes. Then, quietly as he came, he picked up his bag and gave it to the servant outside.

"Tell the manager," he said, when they had turned a corner in the hall, "to give me another room." Then he added, "I prefer to be on the ground floor."

When he emerged a little later, dinner-coated and invigorated by his con-

quest of the ancient tub, carved from a solid marble block, Jeanne had not come down.

From the bar and the table-strewn veranda on which it opened came gusts of good humor. The green swizzle was doing its sturdy work. The green swizzle works with a smile, but manfully. Probably you know it. If not, don't miss it. A simple-seeming thing, compounded, I believe, of rum and lime juice and something else which is probably a secret. If you knew you couldn't get it now. So let it pass.

Just a seat at a little table, and the thing was before him. For a second he moved over to the bar, because he wanted to see how it was done. Across the historic rosewood counter he watched a bartender twisting the slender swizzle stick between flattened palms, making the little ball on the end, flanged like a turbine, revolve back and forth in the glass of rum and lime and whatever else.

"What do you think of it?" asked a man from Milwaukee, one of those people who get very red in the face at the second drink.

"I didn't think it possible," said Haughton, and he meant it.

When he went back to his table he was joined by a happy lot of ship acquaintances, who told him everything he wanted to know—when dinner would be served, if there was to be dancing, and if it had been decided whether the moon would be full tonight. They told him, in addition, that a night trip through the city was arranged for. He turned his chair so he could see the stairs, and waited. The picture of a high, white room, satisfyingly bare, kept fluttering across his vision.

Presently she came. He saw her when she paused at the head of the stairs, looking through the crowd below; watched her sure, poised progress down, and met her at the foot.

She became at once the center of things. Her shoulders and arms were almost luminous against the blackness of her gown. Her hair was caught with the iridescent comb. A crimson fan of slender trailing feathers hung from her arm. She seemed to see only Haughton, with that same enveloping quality in her gaze which affected him like a sudden glimpse of power and appeal consciously blended.

As they passed through the crowd Haughton looked back and saw Mrs. Hammond coming down. He guided Jeanne to the left and they made for the gallery on that wing of the building. Among the established relations of the place there wasn't one that was decently quiet. Whereupon Jeanne smashed a convention by passing through a corner of the bar and seating herself leisurely at a table on the bar's veranda.

There was so much he wanted to tell her directly, with half truths turned into whole truths and a clear light on the path. He was almost sure that he was rounding out his journey of contentment, with the milestones slipping past at an amazing rate. Yet something in her face held him back, a restless sort of questioning which made him wonder.

"You wanted me?" he asked.

"Very much," Jeanne answered.

"Then Mrs. Hammond came. She talked about my family—and my husband."

Jeanne played with her glass, making a chain of wet rings on the table.

"I knew, of course," she went on, "that family tradition meant a great deal to Mrs. Hammond, but I didn't know she could be so eloquent—or so suggestive."

Haughton lighted a cigarette studiously and threw away the match, saying nothing. Jeanne held out her hand. Haughton gave her the cigarette and lighted another.

"You see, she has known the Nevils a long time, particularly the branch that I—that we——" Jeanne hesitated, then continued quickly, as if annoyed at her avoidance of the inevitable phrase. "I mean, the branch that Philip Nevil, my husband, belongs to. She has known him many years. I suppose she thinks that gives her the right to——" The sentence was not finished.

Jeanne waited. Haughton's guarded gaze was his only answer.

Jeanne continued slowly:

"She was trying to make what's ahead—at home—seem desirable; yet no amount of diplomatic description can make a Nevil anything but a Nevil—heavy, methodical, successful. That's all one can say against them, but it is enough."

Jeanne's lips fell into lines too severe for the rest of her smooth face.

Haughton's first thought was that this appraisal of her husband, the only definite criticism she had made, was brought forth by the directness of her nature. Something had to be faced, and she chose not only to confront it herself, but to have him do so, too. He had avoided it because he thought she wanted it so. If she chose to dissolve this well-nigh final reticence, it was because she admitted a new quality in their relation, one to which he responded keenly.

Yet for the life of him he could not help wondering if "heavy, methodical, successful" were basis enough for the alluring discontent of her. Could this have sent her journeying to another continent? He was very sure that he wanted to represent in himself a contrast to something more vital than this.

He knew little of her obligations. He had not cared. It had been enough to find his pleasure in their agreements, his amusement in their differences; to talk through silences, and ask by inference. She had established all that back in Buenos Aires; and if she stood for

the end of his waiting and wanting, she had not let him be quite sure of it.

Her people, she had said, were urging her to return home, had even volunteered to come and get her. For the sake of being on the *Vasari* with him, she had been willing to go back to whatever awaited her there. That had meant the narrowing circle of the personal, throwing them so close to each other that Haughton believed one decisive moment could remake their lives.

Yesterday Jeanne had agreed that before they left Barbados he could say the definite thing which had been left unsaid. To-night she closed his lips by telling him more than she had ever told, yet not enough to show him her heart. If there were a single chance of happiness for her with Philip Nevil, Haughton could say nothing which would endanger it. Journey's end is not contentment when there is such grief as that along the way. So there on a little Barbados veranda he waited the clearing word from Jeanne.

God and the state department would otherwise, as was proven by the appearance of the wife of the ambassador to the Argentine. She remained with them through dinner and so far into the dancing that Haughton gave up hope.

During one of the intervals she demonstrated the subtlety of the diplomatic vernacular by saying:

"Jeanne dear, I wish so much Philip were here. He would love the place, the unusualness and charm of it."

"Do you think so?" Jeanne replied.

"Certainly," returned Mrs. Hammond. "Philip is sufficiently imaginative for that."

Jeanne smiled slowly.

But Mrs. Hammond was not through.

"You know he would try to like it, my dear, if you did."

She had a little gift for Haughton, also. To him she said urbanely:

"You must meet Philip Nevil, Mr.

Haughton. He is quite splendid, and adores our Jeanne here."

When they were dancing again Haughton said:

"You told me I could say something to you to-night, and I am going to. I've been wanting to ever since that last night of carnival in Buenos Aires. You remember. In a few minutes I shall leave you. I am going out with the crowd that's looking for sights to-night, just to end Mrs. Hammond's sport. Dancing stops at one o'clock, I'm told. An hour later I'll be under your window. You will see me?"

They were half around the floor before Jeanne answered.

"I'll come down to you."

"Tell me this much now," Haughton asked. "If some one else were here, would you see me anyhow?"

He had to bend quite close to hear her reply.

"What could I do, my dear?"

They stopped at a window which looked out to the north. Out there a searchlight swept the sky.

"What is it?" Jeanne asked of some one passing.

"The *Vestris*, our sister ship. She's almost in. Be fun to see her, eh?"

A moment later Jeanne said again, as if answering her thought and Haughton's:

"What could I do? What choice would I have?"

It sent him away thoughtfully, enticed and repelled, and it stayed with him persistently, bridging a gap between hope and uncertainty—until it was blurred by such pictures as he had hardly anticipated, of Bridgetown at night, surpassing even the expectations of the ship folk.

Dance halls, where yellow women sang in imitation of their sisters of the outer world; music of strange, disturbing intervals, to which a dancer moved alone with undulating step, fast and faster, till her short hair and earrings

described a glistening circle about her ardent face. Winding streets that led deeper into the passion jungle; an upper room where a dozen lithe, brown bodies swayed in the garish light, weaving a wild, primitive pattern, while others chanted a moaning, shuffling, maddening accompaniment. Then the dim streets again, past low thatch and 'dobe slum houses, on to the special something which was staged on ship nights, to be witnessed only by the initiated.

Haughton had left them. He could not endure it. Against his will it shook him with its primal power, disturbing a vision which he wished to keep clean cut.

He walked rapidly, past smiling windows and open doors, and soon he was out of it all.

With wider streets and a cool sea breeze rustling through the palm tops, his brain smoothed out its wrinkles. He was sure he had never seen such moonlight. It was pouring down over the city like a crystal bath.

He came to Waterfront Street. The government buildings were there, with the wireless station in full operation.

Out in the harbor the *Vestris* had dropped anchor. Haughton caught the faint responsive buzzing of her operator. He watched the silhouettes of her passengers along the deck rail. They were sentenced to a tantalizing night on shipboard because of the law of the harbor which forbade disembarkation between nightfall and daylight. If there were one among them who was as anxious to get ashore as he was glad to be here, Haughton was sorry.

"Hard luck, my friend," he laughed.

He dropped into the wireless station, for no reason except that nothing better offered and he had rather a longing for the sound of an Anglo-Saxon voice. The two operators were taking down innumerable messages. No assistants or messengers were in sight. He asked if by chance there were a

message for one John Fleming Haughton. Nothing. But—

"Are you at the Marine?" asked an operator.

"Quite so."

"Do you know whether a Mrs. Philip Nevil is there?"

"Yes."

"Thanks," and he turned back to his work.

"I'll take the message for you," Haughton offered.

"Impossible."

"Why?" said Haughton with a suggestion of the eternal male child in his query.

"Against orders."

Haughton liked to have his way. He felt in his pockets and extracted the "Be it known" affair of the deputy governor.

"You will be quite safe," he said.

The operator looked it and Haughton over thoughtfully.

"Two messages," he said with abrupt decision. "Sign here."

A quarter hour later Haughton turned away from the water front, into a forgotten-looking roadway which would bring him up near the hotel. The bearded fig trees which give Barbados its name hung low along the way, drooping like a line of drowsy old men who had forgotten to go home. The earth seemed very still, very secret and yielding. Haughton felt an oddly elevating sort of anticipation, a breathless sort of imminence, as if a veil were being lifted for his comprehension alone.

Suddenly he heard a voice.

*"Pleurez, pleurez mes yeux!
Tombez triste rosée—"*

it sang—and stopped, leaving the air empty. The tones were fresh, rich, and most expressive. Haughton waited expectantly. It came again, repeating that heart cry from the opera "Le Cid," with a thrilling sort of understanding.

He hardly knew that he was entering an open gate and passing into a leafy yard which stretched away to a tumble-down house, unlighted and dreary. The soft earth soaked up his footbeats. He circled an acacia shrub, and saw a girl.

On the ground, her head thrown back against a curving marble bench, her spun-gold hair turned into a shimmering halo by the moon, a white mantilla falling from her bare shoulders, her hands pressed against her breast—Haughton saw and marveled. She lifted her arms, then let them fall outstretched on the seat behind her head. Again that troubled phrase, ending in a sob:

*"Pleurez toutes vos larmes,
Pleurez mes yeux!"*

Haughton moved nearer, amazed and uplifted. He could see the texture of her skin, the curve of her moist lashes.

"The perfect piece of porcelain," he whispered to himself.

"Who are you?" she asked. Not a gesture of surprise, not a movement except the fleeting touch of a hand to her eyes; then an inspection of him, direct and unafraid as a child's.

"A *voyageur*, I suppose," said Haughton.

"The *Vasari*?"

"Yes."

"From Rio or Buenos Aires?"

"Both."

"Is Rio beautiful?"

"Yes."

"Mathilde says I'll like it."

"You're going there?"

"Mathilde says so. On the *Ves-tris*."

"Why?" he asked, feeling that Rio was not the place for such loveliness as this.

"Because there's nothing left for me here."

"May I sit down?"

She nodded. Haughton wanted nothing so much as to look at her, to learn

the perfection of her, just as other porcelains had whispered their dreams to him and persuaded him of their power.

"As beautiful as Paris?"

"Yes."

"Naples?"

"Not quite," said Haughton. "Do you know Naples?"

"I spent a vacation there. I was in school in Paris, you see; and every spring we went somewhere, all ten of us. But I wouldn't have enjoyed it at all if I'd known what I know now."

She seemed to find her own particular peace in speaking. How was he to know that, except for a subtle negress, his was the only understanding she had confronted for many days?

"Mother wrote saying that she was sending her last letter to me. She said the money was gone, and everything else. She had kept me out of it all, and wouldn't let me share her troubles. She had paid those ridiculous foreign bills as if there had been no failure. And she had reached the end. She sent me one last gift—this."

A small hand was held out for Haughton to examine. He touched it gently, to all intents studying the gift, a ring of diamonds set deep in soft, old, yellow gold. He looked into the troubled eyes and felt his heart fill up with music.

One does not need an extra sense to recognize truth when it really is beauty, which isn't always the case. One just knows. Moreover there is a mighty lot of joy in finding the thing which satisfies completely. Second comes the involuntary contrast with everything else which one has tried so faithfully—often without being aware of the effort—to think of as perfect. This woman child, with her spun-gold hair, was laying unseen hands on a head already bent in homage.

"They had written her from the school about my voice, you see, and she was hoping it would see me through.

But I couldn't do that, or anything else, until I had seen her again. So instead of trying over there, I came home, without telling her I was coming."

"I see," said Haughton softly.

"But she wasn't here. They said she had gone over to Trinidad to sell some land, and over there they told me she had returned to Barbados. At first I laughed. Then I wept, because I couldn't find her. No one had seen her, no one, anywhere. So I looked up old Mathilde. She always hated mother, and for that very reason I thought she might know something about her. She didn't. But she's been very kind to me. She took me in—my money was running low, you see—took me into this house my father gave her. It hurt my pride, but there was nothing else for it."

Haughton agreed. Then he ventured a question.

"Why did she hate your mother?"

The answer came unhesitatingly:

"Mathilde is black and my father was often seen going to her cabin. Do you know what that means in a place like Barbados?"

"Quite."

"Sometimes I used to meet Mathilde's children on the street, when mother and I were driving. Mother would turn pale and look away. Yes, Mathilde hated her. I don't see why she shouldn't hate me, too, but she doesn't."

"No?"

"No, indeed. She says I have a future in Rio."

"What does she mean?"

"Singing,"

"Opera?"

"I haven't voice enough for that. She means revues and summer places."

Haughton stirred uncomfortably. He knew Rio well, and he placed it even lower in the scheme of "life" than the pre-war St. Petersburg. He knew that no American or Englishwoman

io—Ains.

could do such work as Mathilde had planned without giving up every reservation she held. No success was possible otherwise. It was taken for granted by the managers, and counted on by the habitués.

So Haughton knew that old Mathilde had planned a shrewd and satisfying revenge.

"You must not go," Haughton said.

"No?" She said it in surprise, not opposition. "Why not?"

"Because——" And Haughton, to whom words were craftsman's tools when he dealt with porcelains, had nothing else to say.

This questioning face, the parted lips and eyes wide with interest, suggested not a whit of weakness. Helplessness, perhaps, but only for the moment. She would find a way, and she wouldn't cry—where any one could see. But she would be bruised, because the highroad flower always is.

"Will you let me think it out for you?" Haughton asked very gently. "And talk with old Mathilde?"

"You're very kind," and her eyes dropped for the first time.

"May I come back to-morrow?"

The girl had spread her filmy skirts on the curving bench, drawing them out with the lingering touch of one who hasn't quite gotten over the surprise of being grown.

"Come," she said, "but Mathilde is away. I have the old place all to myself to-night and to-morrow. I am going to stay out here till dawn, beside the acacia, and watch the world wake up. I love to hear that sweet early song that everything seems to sing. Mathilde never lets me stay out at night. She says I must save my voice—for Rio."

Haughton made slow progress up the road. That feeling of elevation, of imminence, which had been so amply realized, faded unwillingly. A door had

seemed to open, showing him something he had dreamed of. It was closing slowly. Just such a door the prophet told of, sealed with the mystic seven—and behind it lay contentment. The man was blessed who could enter in freely and unafraid, unbound by any other obligation.

There was to-morrow, of course; but oddly enough to-morrow insists on following a to-night. No matter what it brought forth, he would always have this memory of a moonflower opening its soft petals to the light.

The road grew heavy. The fine, white sand of it slid clumsily under his feet. Something of sternness, gentleness, and loyalty drove him on, something which the generations had put into him.

He did not have to wait for Mrs. Nevil. He stood beneath her window, straight and calm in that clear, cold moonlight. Her curtains parted, and a hand waved understandingly.

The veranda was empty, and dark against the house.

Haughton fingered the wireless messages in his pocket. He would give them to Jeanne at once, and so clear away the smallest thing that could interrupt their understanding.

There was much to be asked, much given—or nothing. It was out into the light together or—what? Haughton felt as if all ending is just a new beginning, with no relation absolutely established.

He gave Jeanne her messages. She went to the edge of the veranda to read them. Then she turned with a little cry, grasping the rail for support.

"My husband is on the *Vestris*," she said. She drew her thin scarf closer. "He is finding a way to come ashore to-night."

Haughton waited. Then he asked: "Will he—find you?"

Her answer came slowly, unwillingly:

"Yes."

"You love him?" Haughton asked, controlled and determined.

Jeanne shook her head.

"No," she whispered.

Haughton took her hands.

"I have wanted so much to be everything to you, Jeanne."

"Yes, I know."

"And I may?"

"You are—almost."

"Everything— You understand, Jeanne?"

"I am not brave enough," she said. She caught his arm, turning her face up to his, restless, brooding, demanding to be understood.

"It's the change, the readjustment, rooting up the old things, and facing the people. I can't do it," she said, clinging to him as if to retain everything that she was throwing away.

"Not even for contentment?"

"How do I know I would find that?" she asked. "Philip loves me. It's the best he has to offer, such as it is."

"Such as it is," Haughton said slowly; and then he knew a great many things he had feared and longed to know.

Something within him seemed to be passing ever so quietly into the country of what might have been. Not a quiver of regret accompanied the change—just the peace which comes with understanding.

"It seems as if I've always been, searching for something," he said, speaking very softly, as men do when they admit their faith in a lifelong dream, "ever since I've known the least little bit about myself. My life has been full of work, of course, and big plans—and real accomplishments. Yet I wouldn't have done things—not so well—if there hadn't been something else to reach out to, to keep on dreaming of and looking for. I hardly know how to tell you what it's like. Call it contentment; call it completion. I've al-

ways known I could trust it to be just right when I found it. Unless a man has something perfect to look forward to, what's the use of anything? Otherwise all the gaps in his life, gaps that stand for failures and shortcomings, would stay unfilled, unatoned for; and that's a pretty dreary outlook, isn't it? Don't you see, Jeanne?"

Mrs. Nevil's face was close to his.

"And you thought——" she said.

A flicker of pride passed out of her eyes, giving way to a moment's wonder, then to something very close to pain. She bent her head until it rested heavily on his arm.

"I wonder if any woman can measure up to—to that?" she asked.

But Haughton did not wonder. He knew. Life seemed to be marvelously centered in a leafy yard he had seen,

with a curving marble bench, and a girl whose hair was turned into a shimmering halo by the moonlight.

Together he and Mrs. Nevil looked out at the night, so still and sentient, night that meets or betrays one's mood.

"It is cold," Jeanne said.

"It is wonderful," Haughton thought.

He bent low over her hands. Then she moved away to the stairs. He watched her slow ascent, poised and graceful to the end.

The forgotten-looking road was calling, and there he went. The bearded fig trees nodded to him. A sleepy bird or two seemed to recognize him. He broke the stillness with his laughter.

"Little moonflower won't have to go to Rio," he said, while his heart filled up with music.



HOW WOULD IT BE?

HOW would it be if you should pass,
Here in the peopled street,
Whose brow is bright in Memory's glass,
Whose very name is sweet?

Ah, would you pause and press her hand?
Ah, would you whisper low:
"Dear, you are back from the Legend-Land!"
Choking the tears that flow?

Or would you shrink till she was lost
Here in the human sea,
As from a shadow sudden tossed
Out of the Used-To-Be?

MAHLON LEONARD FISHER.



The Latchkey

By Alicia Ramsey

Author of "The Marionettes," "The Wax Duchess," etc.

LOVE has nothing to do with beauty. No beautiful woman has ever yet been known who kept her husband's love."

This strange axiom advanced by Ted Crompton in his curious, didactic way over dinner the night of the French Fleet Ball, a lively discussion ensued.

We were still at it over our coffee in the lounge of the Hotel Excelsior when Mrs. James Fortescue, said to be the most beautiful woman in Cannes, appeared.

She was tall and fair with a proud head set on a slim neck and a color that came and went in her face like flame. As always, she was wonderfully turned out.

That night she wore a white lace dress over gleaming satin, with an enormous bunch of lilies at her breast, and a carved, jade comb stuck at just the right angle in the masses of her copper-colored hair. In that crowd of elegant and charming women there wasn't one who could compare with her, either in dress or looks. Not a man in the place but stopped talking to watch her as she came slowly down the stairs with her white feather fan unfurled in her hand and the light from the crystal chandeliers falling on her dazzling arms and shoulders, as milk white and as lustrous as the pearls that lay against her throat.

Such beauty should presuppose joy for the woman who possessed it, yet as she passed me, I was conscious of an extraordinary impression of depression. The scent of the lilies she wore af-

fecting me with the same poignant sadness as lonely fields in the early harrowing or the sound of church bells ringing in the twilight of an autumn night.

She bowed coldly to Ted Crompton, who alone of our party knew her, and went on to join her friends eagerly awaiting her at the other end of the hall.

We had all heard the story of the beautiful widow whose husband had been killed in an accident, leaving her heart the poorer for five years' perfect devotion and her bank account the richer by some twenty thousand pounds a year. The minute she was out of hearing, we turned with one accord on Ted.

"What price your argument now?" we demanded. "What about *her*? Isn't she a beautiful woman? Wasn't hers an ideal marriage? Didn't she manage to retain her husband's love?"

"I've heard he used to bring her home roses every day of his life," said one.

"They were seen out together every night of their lives," said a second.

"He worshipped the ground she trod on; I know that for a fact," said a third.

"Yes, and nicely she repays him for it," snapped old Lady Rawlinson. "Not three months a widow—the poor wretch hardly cold in his grave—and look at her!" Her dark eyes flashed fury at the delicate figure holding its court across the room. "Dancing every night in her white satin and pearls! She might be a bride! Don't talk to me about your beautiful women not keeping

their husbands, Crompton. It's a wonder to me, when they see a woman like that, men are ever fools enough to marry at all!"

The band in the ballroom struck up at that moment and there was a general stampede to secure partners. The officers of the French fleet were all ashore that night and women were scarce.

In a moment the great lounge was deserted. There remained only Crompton, chewing his black cigar, and the beautiful woman at the end of the hall surrounded by a group of eager men.

I lingered on, partly because I had a suspicion that Ted had more to say if he chose to say it; partly because I wanted to hear that laughter again—sweet and clear and cold as mountain ice in sunshine—which floated out on the hot air from time to time.

Beautiful laughter, but sad, I thought—sadder than another woman's tears.

I turned and looked at my host watching that white radiance in her satin and pearls out of his shrewd, unhappy eyes.

"Lovely; rich; young; free; and unhappy! *Why?*"

Crompton opened his battered, old case and took out another cigar.

"I'll tell you," said he.

To the madness of a jazz band and the sound of gay feet whirling over the polished parquet, this was the story he told:

He began abruptly:

"Fortescue and I were friends of lifelong standing. We'd known each other for years. I never met a man I liked better; straight as a die in business; simple; generous; kind.

"I was his best man when he married. Prettiest wedding you ever beheld. Country church; kids from the village throwing flowers; bride in white muslin with a wreath of roses round her head—no need to tell you what she looked like—an angel from heaven who had mislaid her wings! Fortescue was

good looking, too. Six foot one in his socks and a smile on him that sent the women wild. Rich, too. His luck was phenomenal. Everything he touched turned to gold. An ideal marriage if ever you saw one. Too good, my poor old mother used to say. Too happy to be true!"

Crompton took his cigar out of his mouth, looked at it, licked it carefully, and put it back again.

"Yes," he said in that queer, introspective way of his, "too happy to be true. She was about right, my old mother. She generally is.

"I was putting up a big fight for my own happiness just about then, but I managed to find time to drop in and dine with Jim and his wife once or twice a month. Marriage didn't alter our friendship, for a wonder. Rather increased it, in fact. Mrs. Jim went out of her way to be good to her husband's friends. She was that kind.

"For my part, I'd have been satisfied to dine there every night of my life. Charming house; perfect service; wonderful food; first-class wine. The table with its old Dutch silver and its wax candles; the black, hothouse grapes and the red roses—they were right about that—Jim used to bring her roses with his own hand every night of his life. Mrs. Jim, sitting at one end of the table in her white satin and pearls, looking at Jim. Jim at the other end, cracking nuts with his teeth like a boy, looking at her. And the old pictures on the wall of dead-and-gone Fortescues smiling down on them both! A fairy tale it seemed to me. I used to wonder why the devil we couldn't all have homes and wives like that. When I came away, I used to feel kind of purified, as if I'd been to church and said my prayers. Only one thing lacking for perfect happiness. There were no kids to the marriage. Fortescue was mad about kids."

Crompton stopped short.

"She was mad about them, too, for that matter. I saw her once when she thought nobody was looking snatch up a little niece of mine and hold her all clutched up with a look on her face that would have made your heart ache—you know, that kind of look you see on children's faces when they stand outside a sweet shop telling each other what they'd buy if they could——"

Crompton shrugged his shoulders impatiently.

"Well, that beautiful life of theirs went on for five years and more. Then Fortescue died. You know how he was killed, don't you?"

I nodded.

"Run into by a motor car, wasn't he?"

"That's right," said Crompton. "Went across to the pillar box one foggy night and was knocked down and killed on the spot. Alive and happy one minute—not an ache or a pain in the whole of his splendid body—good for another forty years at least; and the next—smashed up; finished. Gone out like a candle. Not a moment to snatch a kiss or say a word of good-by. Just *bang!*—and the whole thing over forever! Gives you a nasty kind of a jolt to think of a strong man being able to go out like that!"

Crompton paused and his eyes lighted. The dead man's wife got up from her chair. With an English lord on one side of her and a French admiral on the other, beseeching her to dance, she went laughing out of the room.

"Looks fine to-night, doesn't she?" said Crompton. "Not a patch on the way she looked the day we buried poor old Jim. More like a statue than a living woman. In her black gown and her widow's veil, she might have been carved out of stone. She was never one to make a fuss and show her feelings, but that look of hers, as if she'd been frozen, made me afraid. I was

scared to death of what would happen when that unnatural calm broke up and she began to cry.

"All the servants had asked to go to the funeral. They were all devoted to Fortescue. When we got back, there they all were, lined up in the hall in their new black dresses and crape bows in their caps. Beastly business—getting back from a funeral. The blinds were still down and the carpet still covered with bits of flowers broken off from the wreaths. Upstairs, a canary was singing fit to break your heart.

"At sight of her with her white face and her black clothes, the maids broke out sobbing and crying, but Mrs. Jim never turned a hair. She told them to leave the blinds down and cover the bird. 'Go get your dinners,' she said. 'You must be hungry. It's late.'

"She went into Jim's study, sat down, and began taking off her gloves. Fortescue's roses that always stood before her portrait were still there, faded in their vases. Fortescue's cigarette, half-burned, still lay in the little, silver tray. His slippers lay on the rug where he'd kicked them off when he went out to the post. On the table stood a decanter of port and some glasses—his, just as he'd left it, half full.

"It was the hell of a cold day, though sunny and bright. The wind cut through and through you like a knife. I poured out a glass of wine and begged her to drink it. They'd told me she hadn't had a thing past her lips since the night he died. She shoved the glass away as if it were poison. 'He loved port,' said she. 'Why should I drink it, when he can't?'

"I felt like a criminal as she sat there watching me drinking mine. I was Fortescue's trustee as well as his lawyer. I told her I must read her his will before I went. At first she refused to hear it. 'He loved money,' she said. 'Why should I spend it, now he can't?'

"I told her it was only a few words—

half a sheet of note paper or less. I took it out and showed it her.

"To my adored wife; everything I possess.

"That did it. When she saw that in his own handwriting and his name scrawled at the foot, she gave a kind of scream and started crying. God! How that woman cried!

"Raved, too, like a madwoman. Out it all came! How he'd loved her. How she'd loved him. What he'd said when he first saw her. What she'd felt when she first saw him. Pet names he'd called her. Little things she'd done for him. Sufficiently hideous for a third person to listen to! She stripped herself bare. I remember thinking to myself how she'd hate me afterward—" Crompton sighed profoundly. "So she does!"

He threw away his chewed-up cigar and lighted a third. After a bit he went on.

"That must have gone on an hour or more—her babbling her heart out and me standing there not speaking a word. At last she stopped and I made ready to go. She asked to keep the will. 'His last love letter,' she called it, poor soul. She stood there hugging it up to her breast and kissing it, with the tears running down her face like an unhappy child.

"Fortescue's keys were still hanging in the drawer just as he'd left them when he went out to post his letter that night. She opened it to put the will away. Inside the drawer, on the top of the papers, lay a latchkey very new and bright. She put down the will and picked up the key. I can still see the surprise on her tear-stained face.

"'What's that key, I wonder?' she said. 'It's a latchkey,' she added, looking at me.

"'Whose key can it be?' said she, turning and twisting the key.

"I picked up the will and put it safely away in my breast pocket. As a lawyer, I have a natural instinctive distrust of

latchkeys that don't belong to a man's own front door. At that minute the door opened and a maid came in with a parcel of letters tied up with pink tape.

"'Otway Coombs, Jim's confidential clerk has just brought them up from the office. He thought they might be of importance,' she said.

"'Never tell me there's no devil that arranges these little matters,' said Crompton. "There is. That letter might just as well have been at the bottom of the packet as at the top, mightn't it? Then I could have taken the whole lot safely away and there'd have been an end of the matter. But no! Not a bit of it! There it lay, dead on the top—blue-edged paper; gold-and-blue monogram; woman's fine handwriting—for all the world to see!

"I tried to get the packet away from the maid, but Mrs. Jim was too quick for me. She'd untied the tape and opened the letter before I had a chance to move.

"She read it through once, then turned back and read it again. All the youth and beauty in her seemed to shrivel up and disappear. It was like seeing a perfectly well person die before your eyes. 'It's a lie,' she said and gave me the letter.

"It was quite short; only a few lines, starting with '*My own darling*' and ending up with thanking him for sending the plumber and please be sure and come in time for the children's tea. At the top was the printed address. At the bottom, three badly made crosses all smudged. Beneath them was written: '*Kiddies send kisses to their darling Dads.*'

"Not much to make a fuss about," said Crompton savagely, "but I've read death sentences that have moved me less.

"I gave her back the letter and she put it away in her bag and picked up the key. 'It may be the key of the house,' she said. 'I'm going to see.'

"Half hour later I followed her out of the house into the taxi. She didn't seem to realize whether I was there or not. She sat there with the key in her hand staring at it as if she were hypnotized. The birds were singing and the sun was shining: the children were feeding the ducks and swans—we could hear them shouting and laughing. Life seemed a pretty hideous nightmare to me as we drove across the shining park.

"The house was charming, all white paint, lace blinds, and flower boxes—one of those houses you notice if you happen to pass. The steps were as white and the brass as bright as at Fortescue's own palatial abode. She noticed the brass, too. 'They must use the same paste as ours,' she said. Extraordinary the things people say at such moments. There was she with her whole life crumbling into ruins about her, talking to me about brass paste!

"She put the key into the door and opened it and we walked in. A maid was crossing the hall with a pot of hot water. Her eyes were red with crying and she was dressed in black. She had a crape bow instead of a cap on her hair. She stared at us as well she might. She looked at the door and at the key in Mrs. Jim's hand and asked us who we wanted to see.

"Ever notice how quick your London servants are?" said Crompton irrelevantly. "There we were calm as a mill pond, not a word or a look to show anything was up, but that girl twigged in a minute something was wrong.

"My mistress is out," said she.

"Then I'll wait till she comes in," said Mrs. Jim.

"There was a sound of voices coming from one of the rooms—children's voices at that. I heard them. So did Mrs. Jim.

"I'll wait in there," said she.

"The maid stood in front of the door trying to prevent us from going in. She

stammered out that her mistress was in great trouble and couldn't see any one.

"She'll see me," said Mrs. Jim. She took the girl by the shoulder and pushed her aside. She opened the door and went in.

"The room was a sort of dining room and living room, mixed up; you know the sort of room. Bookcases, work-baskets, easy-chairs; one of those human rooms that make you feel at home the minute you go in.

"On the wall was a painting of Jim. On the mantelpiece was a vase of red roses, Jim's favorite flowers. On the table was a currant loaf and a plate of water cress—Jim's favorite things for tea. I'd heard his wife chaff him a hundred times on his low taste in food. I'd seen her put the water cress between the bun loaf and feed it him a thousand times and more. In the window was a cage with a canary, all covered up with black.

"At the tray sat a little woman, short and fat, with pretty, gray eyes all bunged up with crying, dressed in widow's weeds. Beside her sat two children—a boy of eight and a girl about four. Beautiful children they were, too. No need to ask whose they were. They were as like poor old Jim as two peas.

"The little woman was cutting bread and butter when we went in. She got up and stood there, with the loaf in one hand and the knife in the other, looking at Mrs. Jim. Talk about classic plays and the old Greek tragedies! You should have seen those two standing there looking at each other, not speaking a word.

"I am James Fortescue's wife," said Mrs. Jim. "Who are you?"

"The little woman dropped the loaf and burst out crying. The two kids jumped down from their chairs and rushed to their mother. They burst out crying, too. There the three of them stood holding on together—jammy faces; sticky hands; fat little woman;

commonplace stuff enough, in all conscience, but somehow wonderful. Queer thing that family business. Nothing like it in the whole world. That little woman would have stuck her bread knife into any one who'd have harmed a hair of those curly heads.

"His children?" said Mrs. Jim and, oh, the way she said it! She might have been asking for a cup of tea.

"Up went the little woman's head. No shame there! Nothing but sheer pride.

"His and mine," said she."

Crompton sighed.

"I've seen a good few things in my time in the dock and out of it, but I've yet to see a look on any woman's face like the look on Mrs. Jim's. It made my blood run cold.

"So God is *not* altogether merciless," she said. "They might have been his and mine!"

"She stood there a moment looking round the room; the roses; the picture on the wall; the bun loaf; the water cress; taking it all in. Last of all, she looked at the bird. 'So you've covered your canary, too, have you!' she said. 'That's quite good. I covered mine!' Then she laughed. Terrible laughter, sadder than another woman's tears."

I looked at Crompton, startled. It is a strange thing to hear one's own thought in another man's mouth.

"That finished it," said Crompton grimly. "I'm telling you just how it happened. That's every word they spoke. Mrs. Jim put the key on the table, turned on her heel, and walked out of the room.

"The sun was still shining and the birds were still singing and the children were still feeding the ducks and swans, as we drove back across the park.

"London servants!" said Crompton. "You can't beat them! When we got back, there they all were huddled up in the hall; looking over the stairs; peeping out of the rooms; hanging about,

the whole gang of them waiting to know what was up. Mrs. Jim didn't turn a hair. She told them to draw up the blinds and uncover the bird.

"Send Agatha to me and order the car. There's been a mistake," she said.

"I suppose they all thought her grief had driven her mad. They weren't far wrong. An hour later she came down in a white cloth coat with a sable collar and a sable hat with a great, white osprey thing stuck out at the side and a rope of pearls hanging down past her waist. Magnificent she looked, too, with a smile on her lips and the color coming and going in her face like flame. Might have been a happy, going-away bride! Behind her came her French maid, Agatha, in her neat, serge suit and a jewel case in her hand. Her sallow face was as yellow as wax and her black eyes sparkling as if they'd jump out of her head. She'd always hated Fortescue—God alone knows why. Maybe she'd known all along what was going on. Frenchwomen always know everything. I wouldn't have one within a mile of my wife if ever I had one! She looked like Mrs. Jim's evil angel walking after her down that staircase, drunk with joy."

Crompton pulled the little glass saucer nearer to him and crushed out the stump of his chewed-up cigar.

"Do you wonder I say beauty has nothing to do with love?" he demanded. "I tell you the beautiful woman has yet to be born who can keep her husband's love. It's not the man's fault entirely, mark you. Beauty like that wants a lot of living up to. Ice pudding and champagne are all right for a honeymoon, but which of us wants them every day? It's beef and beer for a steady diet. It's the little, plain woman with the simple ways and the soft eyes that gets her man and keeps him every time."

Crompton reached for his liqueur and sipped it slowly. His keen eyes were intolerably sad, his face weary.

"Strange creatures, women!" he sighed. "She divided the money into three equal portions—one for herself; one for the little woman; one for the two kids. Gave up a fortune without a thought. Countermanded the marble angel blowing a trumpet and told the cemetery people to apply for further instructions to the little woman—it was *her* affair. Came out here and has been dancing and breaking men's hearts ever since. They say she's had more offers in a month than other women get in years!" Crompton drained his liqueur and set the glass down with a bang. "I loved Jim Fortescue, but I hope he's frizzling in hell for this thing he's done! I wish I were dead!" said he.

In the silence that fell between us the throbbing of the band came to me, wild and exotic, calling to one's soul of strange passions and the madness of life and love. It affected Crompton, too. I could see it by the nervous twitching of his well-kept hand.

Suddenly he burst out laughing.

"All of us sick of living! None of us ready to die! God, what fools we mortals be!" He signed to his waiter, threw a bill on the table and heaved himself out of his chair. "Come on and let's watch the women dancing!" He put his arm through mine and dragged me across the room.

We stood in the doorway and looked in at the dancing. The lights were down. The colored balloons on their tinsel strings moved and swayed with the dancers as if they were dancing, too. The moon came flooding through the great windows, transforming the scene to an enchantment of beauty and light.

I stood and looked for the face I

longed to see. Suddenly the crowd parted and I saw Jim Fortescue's wife.

She had thrown a scarf of scarlet tulle around her head and shoulders. It billowed and floated out behind her like a sunset cloud. It was not like a woman dancing. It was like the flickering of a passionate flame.

"A marsh light that once was a star!" Crompton spoke beneath his breath, but I heard him. "God help the man who tries to restore *her* faith in God and man!"

He lumbered away in search of bridge and whisky. The lights went up. The music stopped. The dancers streamed out through the open windows to the terrace beyond.

Slowly she came up the room, leaning on the arm of an old Italian prince, the most sought after *parti* in Cannes.

Her golden head shone through her rosy veil. Her laughter floated out on the hot air, sweet and clear and cold as mountain ice in sunshine. The color came and went in her face like flame.

The scent of the lilies at her breast affected me with the same poignant sadness as lonely fields in the early harrowing or the sound of church bells ringing in the twilight of an autumn night.

As I stood aside to let her pass, she turned her proud head on her slim neck and her eyes met mine. I saw the soul in torment that burned behind those fires of frozen blue.

The thought of Crompton's words came back to me.

"God help the man who tries to restore *her* faith in God and man!"

Right then I made up my mind to try. And if our two sturdy young sons are proof, I have succeeded well.





In Broadway Playhouses

By Dorothy Parker

Take Them or Leave Them

WITH fingers weary and worn, with brain in a sickly daze, a woman sat in a padded cell reviewing the season's plays. For a joke may be a joke and all that, but when it comes to the point where the producers throw off all restraint and open up new shows at the rate of five and six an evening, then things begin to get a little too thick to be really homy. This saying a few kind words for the current plays is nice, clean work, that any lady can do in her own home during her spare time, so long as the plays open one at a time, quietly and without jostling. But when twenty or thirty new productions burst out all at once, the sanitarium yawns ahead.

But then the life does have its sunny side. There are, after all, compensations—notably W. Somerset Maugham's new play, "The Circle." It makes up for the stretch of dreary evenings that have gone before and that must come after—for the "Lilies of the Fields," for the "Pot Lucks," for the "Only Thirty-eights," and the "Thank Yous." When you have said this, there is nothing left to say of "The Circle." That is the altitude record for praise.

So, seeing that there is nothing further to say, I shall go right on talking about "The Circle," thus proving that I am a born reviewer of plays. Prac-

tically anything that Maugham might write would be brilliant—the "practically" is put in by way of reference to "Cæsar's Wife"—and the story of "The Circle" is, as we say here in America, Maugham's dish. It is the brilliantly malicious tale of the wife who left an appropriate note on her Victorian pincushion and eloped to the Riviera with her lover. Thirty years after, they return, old and quarrelsome, wrinkled and dyed, to find that the lady's daughter-in-law is contemplating taking the same step. The daughter-in-law and the man she is in love with regard these two horrible examples, listen with sympathy, and interest to their words of warning—and then, at the end of the play, jubilantly set out for the Riviera together.

But it isn't just the plot, though that would be ample for any one else. It is all the little, bitter twists of line and incident that no one else seems to be able to manage. Once you know that there can be a thing like "The Circle," plays in which a couple of sterling-hearted city crooks come to the small town and put the town on its feet and the inhabitants into dress suits, and plays in which the little waif from the alley puts on a Tappé gown and marries the son of the steel magnate, seem doubly hard to bear.

The Selwyns have risen to the occasion and gone the limit in casting "The Circle." Mrs. Leslie Carter, John Drew, Ernest Lawford, Estelle Winwood, and John Halliday are all present on the stage. You owe it to yourself and your family to see "The Circle," if you never see anything else.

Another of the bright moments in the season, although it is what is known as a far cry from the Maugham play, is the "Music Box Revue," which opens Irving Berlin's new theater, the Music Box. It is always a bit rough on the readers, if any, to crash out into superlatives, but, unless you stretch your memory back to the days of the first two Cohan Revues, it is difficult to recall any better musical entertainment. The show is lavishly put on; the cast includes Willie Collier, Sam Bernard, Florence Moore, Joseph Santley, Ivy Sawyer, Hugh Cameron, and the apologetic-mannered Mr. Berlin himself; the music, if not exciting, is no trouble to listen to; the lyrics are ingenious; and—perhaps this is the trick—there is a great deal that is extremely funny. Some genius has seen to it that each of the long succession of acts is short; nothing ever is allowed to live to the point where it starts to drag.

Just by way of earning my free seats, I might suggest that "The Music Box Revue" is a trifle too much of a good thing. It doesn't finish till nearly midnight. If the management were to come to me and implore my aid, I might be persuaded to hint that the air could salubriously be given to the ballet number, that Miss Moore's rather overpersonal monologue would stand cutting admirably, and that there might be, say, just a dash less of Miss Renee Riano and Miss Wilda Bennett, despite the former's avowedly comic dancing and the latter's admittedly efficient voice. Also, as long as we're on the subject, it would be nice if you could hear Willie Collier's lines. I bet they are great.

It is a severe strain to refer to "A Bill of Divorcement" as one of the brighter things on the current horizon, for it is very nearly as gloomy as they come. It is better not to overwork the idea, and just say that Clemence Dane's play is considerably above most of the present local attractions. Its story is that of a man insane for years, who suddenly recovers his sanity and comes home to find that his wife has divorced him and is about to marry again. The principal part, though, is not the wife's, but the daughter's. Afraid of passing on insanity to her possible children, she dismisses her fiancé, letting him think it a mere caprice of hers. I am the last one to get in any mean slurs on my native sex, but all I ask is, show me just one woman who would not have told that man why she was giving him up, and have got at least the thrill of acclaimed martyrdom out of her act. Anyway, to saunter back to the plot, the daughter spurs her vacillating mother on to marry the man she loves, and the play ends with the girl planning to devote her life to her father.

I can't seem to find any reasonable explanation for it, but somehow "A Bill of Divorcement" left me profoundly unmoved. Certainly Katherine Cornell's fine playing of the daughter's rôle is utterly satisfying, but in the presentation as a whole, something, somewhere, seems curiously lacking. Perhaps one of the things about it is that Janet Beecher is not the logical person to play one of those weak and helpless rôles, such as the wife's should be. Miss Beecher makes of her a fine, big woman, with the assurance born of glowing health, and while it is a refreshingly wholesome picture, it is not one to command much sympathy. You might as well try to work up a feeling of tender commiseration for Susanna Cocroft. Nor did Allan Pollock, though he made the husband an arrest-

ing figure, seem to me to make him a pitiful one. His nervous gestures and strange manner of half singing his lines do not tend to convince one that he is completely restored to sanity. One rather expects him to have a violent relapse at any moment. It may be that his is a remarkable pathological study, and that I missed it neatly. This is so possible that I don't like to dwell on it. But the fact remains that I was left respectful, attentive, and cold during the entire performance.

"Ambush," the new Theater Guild production, is another play that just narrowly misses out because you cannot get up the requisite amount of sympathy for its central character. And if you can't extend the season's condolences to him, Heaven knows whom you could work yourself into a state about. He is a poor clerk, living in a Jersey suburb. His daughter repeatedly goes wrong and seems to like it, his wife lies to him, he loses his job that he has had for seventeen years, and what little money he has is swept away in oil stocks—the minute you hear any one on the stage so much as utter the word "oil," you may always expect the worst. At the end of the evening, he is being forced to accept the position offered him by the young married man who is so lavishly looking after his daughter. The play leaves you with the cheery conviction that everything is as bad as possible; and could there be any change, it would be for the worse.

It doesn't seem as if Arthur Richman, the author, could be held responsible for the lack of sympathy one feels for the stricken clerk. But as played by Frank Reicher, he is so trembling, so overkindly, so full of gentle nagging and weak worrying that the best you can do for him is to throw him a little impatient pity. The part requires Mr. Reicher to be on the stage during the entire drama, and, save for a few separated moments when he does manage to

make you share his misery, you never feel that before you is a broken man, but, rather, a painstaking actor.

The play, like all the Theater Guild productions, is admirably set and extremely well acted by Florence Eldridge, Jane Wheaton, and Charles Ellis. And, in spite of the irritation the leading character causes you, "Ambush" is an intensely interesting play, and another thing for the Theater Guild to be proud of.

The local theaters have lately been affected with a very scourge of small-town dramas, all according to the good old family recipe, all supplied with the comic village characters, all sweet and clean and neatly fitted out with deliriously happy endings. It is these plays, the Fords of the theater, that give one additional respect for an author like Arthur Richman and a play like "Ambush." No one wants to imply that it is the Great American Drama, but it is blessedly far above what has come to be the Typical American Drama. And if this be treason, you know what you can do with it.

"Pot Luck," which has James Rennie wasted on its leading part, is the little thing about the crook who comes to the small town, reforms, marries a comparative heiress, wins the respect of the natives, runs for mayor, and—there is evidently some idea of climax—has stories accepted by one of the big magazines. Rockcliffe Fellowes gives a likable performance of the secondary crook's rôle, and there are some decidedly agreeable-looking doughnuts consumed in the first act. And that is about all one can say for "Pot Luck."

"Only Thirty-eight" has Mary Ryan as its star, which tells the whole story. It is all about the widowed mother of two impossible children, and it shows how she comes sweetly and cleanly into her own and marries again. There are the usual village cut-ups, and everything is as sweet and tiresome as possible.

"Thank You," by Winchell Smith and Tom Cushing, is deftly done—Mr. Smith must be able to do this sort of thing with one hand tied behind him, by now—and gently amusing. The small-town characters are not so obtrusively comic as they might be, and you can guess what a relief that is. If ever a play ended at the second act, "Thank You" is that very play, but there is, of course, a third, so that the dress suits can be brought in, and the audience can feel that it has had its money's worth.

"The Wren," the current Booth Tarkington comedy, is scarcely visible to the naked eye, so thin it is. It is what you might call a nice little play, and let it go—as soon as possible—at that. It gives Helen Hayes an opportunity to be considerably less buoyant than of late, and George Fawcett a chance to use strikingly realistic Maine dialect.

Of course "Main Street," the inevitable dramatization of the novel, comes well under the head of small-town plays. It was impossible not to expect the worst of "Main Street" when it reached the stage. Cold shudders flickered over the spine when one thought just how bad its dramatizers could make it. So when one sees Harriet Ford's and Harvey O'Higgins' play made from the book, one is so grateful for the good job they have done that one is convinced it is an exceptionally good play. It is only when cold reason sets in, and memory conjures up the long and not infrequent spells when "Main Street" fails to hold the interest, that one realizes there has been a mistake, and the play is only pretty good, after all.

But as a dramatization, it wouldn't offend Sinclair Lewis' own mother. Here and there things are slightly more stressed than they were in the novel—*Carol Kennicott*, for instance, is distinctly more trying than she was in print, and *Doctor Will Kennicott's* kindness and nobility are much more

heavily underscored than are his narrowness and his dullness. But the minor characters are almost word for word as Lewis wrote them. And when one thinks how easily the playwrights might have exaggerated them for the comedy effect, one realizes that theirs was true heroism.

It is difficult to tell how "Main Street" will go with those who haven't read the book. On the night I attended, there was seated behind me a gentleman, called by his companion Maxie, who, from his conversation, was a member of the cloak-and-suit profession. He had never happened to hear of the book, and he was not inclined to hand the play much. Frequently, indeed, he yawned melodiously. However, he thought that *Carol*, played by Alma Tell, was a good-looking girl, and he got a hearty laugh out of *Doctor Kennicott's* getting into bed and drawing up the covers. So the evening was not an entirely lost one for him.

And at that, he was considerably easier to bear than was the batik-bloused lady in front, who had brought a copy of the novel with her, and through her ribbon-garlanded glasses followed as closely as possible the action of the play, just as the devout do at Shakespearean performances, played amid synthetic Elizabethan scenery.

Returning to plays of the big city, what do we come to but "Lilies of the Field," written by William Hurlbut, who evidently saw "The Gold Diggers," and thought it was great stuff. His play treats of those ladies who lead the enviable life of Reilly at the expense of their gentlemen friends, and while these talented young women sit around in three-hundred-dollar tea gowns and talk shop, things are extremely entertaining. But when the plot interferes, conditions become truly terrible. It is a small and uniquely tedious plot, turning into such a preposterously happy ending that even the patient au-

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dience gives way and bursts into discourteous laughter. Marie Doro and Norman Trevor have a rough time, for all the tiresome scenes are given to them—there is one, in particular, in which they compare notes on their travels abroad, which is fully as dull as the conversation of real people on the same topic.

You'd think that "Wait Till We're Married" was going to be something along the lines of "Up in Mabel's Room," and you look happily forward to an evening of wholesome smut. But the title is nothing but a decoy. The comedy is clean as a new pin, and just that exciting. The big laughing scene occurs when three maiden aunts get three maiden slants on stage cocktails. If you know of any high-school class that wants to give a nice little show at commencement, "Wait Till We're Married" would be just the thing for them.

Another disappointment of the same nature is "Bluebeard's Eighth Wife," which is one of those farces translated from the French. The most glowing reports had been heard of how it was

stopped by the police when it played in New Haven. But a dispassionate viewing of it only led one to conclude that there must be a wise ordinance, in New Haven, saying that a show may be closed on account of dullness. Ina Claire and Barry Baxter do what they can to snap things up a bit, but it is scarcely worth their while.

"The Fan" is another translation from the French. If it had been left in the original every one would have been just as well off, and Miss Hilda Spong, who has been wedged into its leading rôle of a kittenish coquette, would have been better off, certainly.

At the Empire Theater fundamental passions are running around loose all over the stage, for Otis Skinner is playing in "Blood and Sand," Tom Cushing's play made from the Blasco Ibañez novel. There are great wads of local color, and the leading lady takes occasion to address Mr. Skinner as "my beast." It is all that way. One might suggest that a more fitting title for the play would be "Beef, Iron, and Wine."

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State of New York, County of New York, (ss.)

Before me, a Notary Public, in and for the State and county aforesaid, personally appeared Ormond G. Smith, who, having been duly sworn according to law, deposes and says that he is President of Street & Smith Corporation, publishers of AINSLEE'S, and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management, etc., of the aforesaid publication for the date shown in the above caption, required by the Act of August 24, 1912, embodied in section 443, Postal Laws and Regulations, to wit:

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Merry Christmas!



OF all the seasons of the year there is none that is so universally, so humanly, appealing as Christmas. It is the one time when human hearts seem to thaw out completely. And the kinship, the sympathy, of people the world over manifests itself in that most obvious of altruistic impulses—giving. And even if, as the cynics and the spugs tell us, Christmas gift-giving has degenerated into soulless bartering and trading, we refuse to believe that there isn't still a great deal of whole-souled sweetness and love prompting in the wings.

We'd like it, of course, if the true Christmas spirit could hold over to the Fourth of July, because we have a hunch that then such things as disarmament parleys wouldn't be necessary, but we're childishly happy over the coming of the season of good will among men, even if it comes, according to the calendar, but once a year. And, like all the rest of the big human family, our first impulse, when we contemplate Christmas, is to give something to somebody. And you, our AINSLEE's readers, being nearest our hearts, we're going to begin with you.

THIS, the January issue of AINSLEE's, which you are holding, is our holiday message to you. Our real Christmas-stocking gift is what we're planning for you for the coming year. During the past year, AINSLEE's has introduced you to many new and decidedly worth-while writers in its pages. Judging by your response, you liked them. It has also brought back to you many whom you have in the past loved and for a while missed from AINSLEE's. And during the coming months we are planning a veritable housewarming of old and new friends. And we invite you to meet them—every month on the thirteenth day, at every news stand.

THE guest of honor at the January reception is Henry C. Rowland, because he has written the best novelette of his career for the February issue, which appears then. We believe that his story, "True to Form," is going to make a host of new friends for AINSLEE's, and we know from past pleasant experience that its old friends are going to renew their pledge of devotion when they have finished reading this remarkable tale.

THE girl had been invited for a week-end at the Palazzo Mancini in southern Italy. "Francey" Taggart was her name, and she was the daughter of an American financier who was helping Luigi Mancini out of a tight place. But, after he had observed

her beauty for a while, Geoffrey Sinclair told himself that she lacked caste. The mark of her supposed breeding was missing. And her Paquin gown he had seen once before—and that gave her away. Smart people, breath-taking intrigue, and the most unusual climax for any mystery story—these make up Henry C. Rowland's amazingly fine novelette, "True to Form."

DID you ever stop to consider what your personal rating in the community would be if people judged you only by so-called appearances? When it was not yet dawn, in the little mining town of Clary, Ronnie Allison, bag in hand, and shrugging her luxurious chinchilla wrap closer, was seen entering the apartment of H. Hillmer, the town's gambling expert. And months later, when her investments in Clary Copper, Consolidated, had jumped, and she was the pet of society, that incident threatened her whole future. For a story strong in its thoroughly human quality and the drama which is life, we can recommend you none better than Hughes Cornell's "Clary Con."

ACCORDING to a bit of Manchu wisdom, no matter how skilled the workman, rotten wood cannot be carved. One of the strongest stories we have had come into this office recently is Winston Bouvé's "Rotten Wood," written around this theme. It is the story of the revolt of impetuous youth against the solid tradition and conservatism of a former generation, and its frenzied embrace of all that bespeaks freedom. Here is a story which will entertain you. It will also make you think.

BUT the biggest thing scheduled for the February issue is the beginning, with a generous installment, of Margaret Pedler's latest and greatest novel, "The Moon Out of Reach." Mrs. Pedler is the most skilled of writers in the art of romance, and she has here written a book which we venture to predict will rank with the great love stories of the world. Plan in advance to follow this great story, for once the issues containing it go on the stand, back numbers will be at a premium.

These stories are but a few of the distinctive line-up in the February issue, and, despite its high quality, the February number will be but one of many equally fine issues to follow it during the year.

To each of its readers AINSLEE's wishes as auspicious a year as it looks forward to itself.

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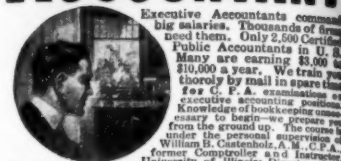
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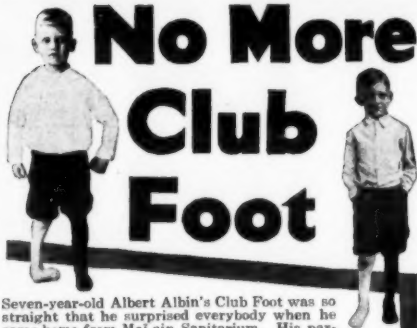
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